# Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

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*In This Issue:*

## *"The Moon Terror"*

*By A. G. BIRCH*

*A Stupendous Novel of The World's End*

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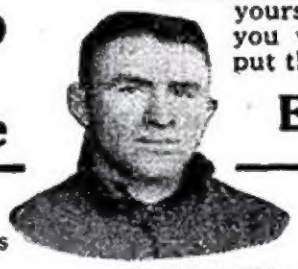

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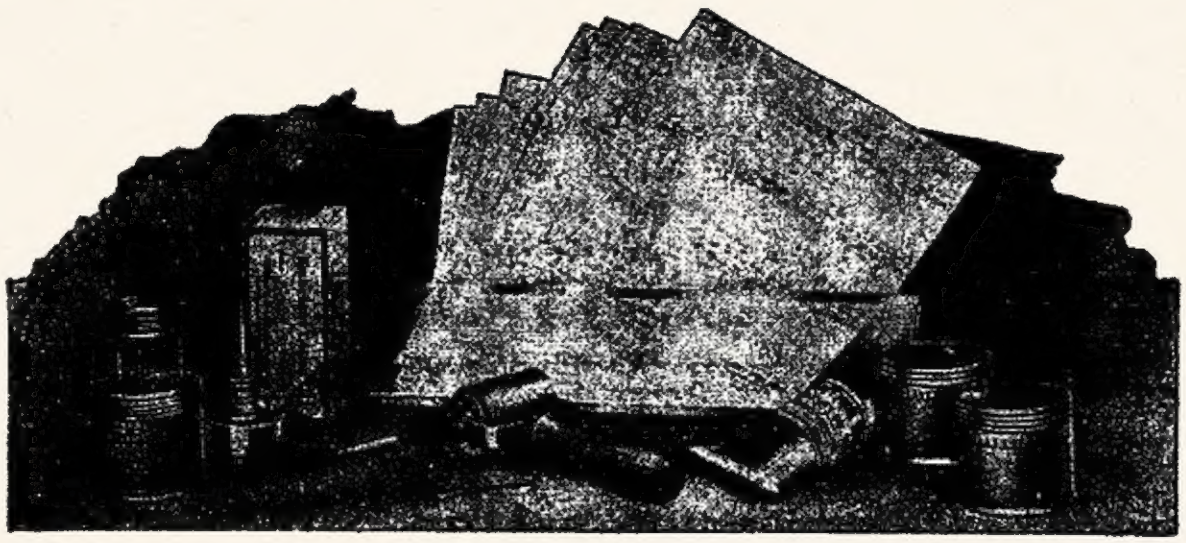

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**EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor***

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## *Contents for May, 1923*

***Nineteen Thrilling Short Stories*** ***Two Complete Novelettes***
***Two Two-Part Stories*** ***Interesting, Odd and Weird Happenings***

THE MOON TERROR ..... A. G. BIRCH 5
*A Remarkable Novel*

THE SECRET FEAR ..... BY KENNETH DUANE WHIPPLE 22
*A "Creepy" Detective Story*

JUNGLE BEASTS ..... WILLIAM P. BARRON 23
*A Complete Novelette*

THE GOLDEN CAVERNS ..... JULIAN KILMAN 30
*A Condensed Novel*

VIALS OF INSECTS ..... PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM 39
*Short Story*

AN EYE FOR AN EYE ..... G. W. CRANE 49
*Short Story*

THE FLOOR ABOVE ..... M. HUMPHREYS 52
*A Short Story with a Horrifying Climax*

PENELOPE ..... VINCENT STARRETT 57
*A Fantastic Tale*

THE PURPLE HEART ..... HERMAN SISK 61
*The Story of a Haunted Cabin*

FELINE ..... BRUCE GRANT 62
*A Whimsical Storiette*

TWO HOURS OF DEATH ..... E. THAYLES EMMONS 64
*A Ghost Story*

MIDNIGHT BLACK ..... HAMILTON CRAIGIE 67
*Short Story*

THE HAUNTED AND THE HAUNTERS ..... BULWER LYTTON 70
*An Old Masterpiece*

THE WHISPERING THING ..... LAURIE McCLINTOCK AND CULPEPER CHUNN 78
*The Conclusion of a Frightful Mystery Novel*

THE DEATH CELL ..... F. K. MOSS 85
*A Weird Short Story*

THE DEVIL PLANT ..... LYLE WILSON HOLDEN 89
*A Story of Ghastly Retribution*

THE THUNDER VOICE ..... F. WALTER WILSON 92
*The Story of a Hairy Monster*

CASE NO. 27 ..... MOLLIE FRANK ELLIS 96
*A Few Minutes in a Madhouse*

THE FINALE ..... WILLIAM MERRIT 99
*A Short Story*

THE CLOSED CABINET ..... 101
*A Story of the Eighteenth Century*

THE EYRIE ..... BY THE EDITOR 113

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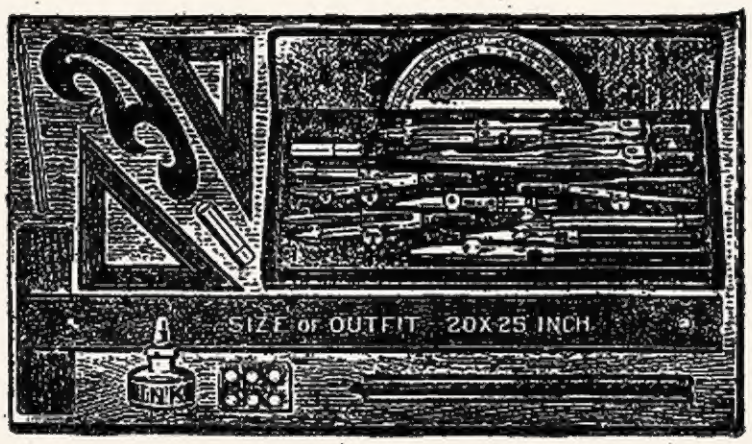


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# WEIRD TALES

*Edited by Edwin Baird*

VOLUME ONE NUMBER THREE 25c a Copy MAY, 1923 Subscription $3.00 A YEAR $3.50 IN CANADA

***The Astounding Events in This Remarkable Novel Leave the Reader Breathless with Amazement***

# The Moon Terror

## *By* A. G. BIRCH

*CHAPTER I.*

THE DRUMS OF DOOM.

THE FIRST WARNING of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the third decade of the twentieth century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America during a night in early June. But, so little was its awful significance suspected at the time, it passed almost without comment.

I am certain that I entertained no forebodings; neither did the man who was destined to play the leading role in the mighty drama that followed—Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, the eminent American astronomer. For we were on a hunting and fishing trip in Labrador at the time, and were not even aware of the strange occurrence.

Anyway, the nature of this first herald of disaster was not such as to cause alarm.

At 12 minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., when there began a lull in the night's aerial telegraph business, several of the larger wireless stations of the Western hemisphere simultaneously began picking up strange signals out of the ether.

They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance—equally far removed from New York and San Francisco, Juneau and Panama.

Exactly two minutes apart the calls were repeated, with clock-like regularity. But the code used—if it *were* a code—was undecipherable.

Until near dawn the signals continued—indistinct, unintelligible, insistent.

Every station capable of transmitting messages over such great distances emphatically denied sending them. And no amateur apparatus was powerful enough to be the cause. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.

Two nights later the calls were heard again, starting at almost the same instant when they had been distinguished on the first occasion. But this time they were precisely three minutes apart. And without the variation of a second they continued for more than an hour.

The next night they reappeared. And the next and the next. Now they began earlier than before—in fact, no one knew when they had started, for they were sounding when the night's business died down sufficiently for them to be heard. But each night, it was noticed, the interval between the signals was exactly one minute longer than the night before.

Occasionally the weird whispers ceased for a night or two, but always they resumed with the same insistence, although with a newly-timed interval.

This continued until early in July, when the pause between the calls had attained more than thirty minutes' duration.

Then the length of the lulls began to decrease erratically. One night the mysterious summons would be heard every nineteen and a quarter minutes; the next night, every ten and a half minutes; at other times, twelve and three-quarters minutes, or fourteen and a fifth, or fifteen and a third.

Still the signals could not be deciphered, and their message—if they contained one—remained a mystery.

Newspapers and scientific journals at last began to speculate upon the matter, advancing all manner of theories to account for the disturbances.

The only one of these conjectures attracting widespread attention, however, was that presented by Professor Howard Whiteman, the famous director of the United States naval observatory at Washington, D. C.

Professor Whiteman voiced the opinion that the planet Mars was trying to establish communication with the earth—the mysterious calls being wireless signals sent across space by the inhabitants of our neighboring world.

Our globe, moving through space much faster than Mars, and in a smaller orbit, overtakes its neighboring planet once in a little over two years. For some months Mars had been approaching the earth. At the beginning of June it had been approximately 40,000,000 miles away, and at that time, Professor Whiteman pointed out, the strange wireless calls had commenced. As the two worlds drew closer together the signals increased slightly in power.

The scientist urged that while Mars remained close to us the government should appropriate funds to enlarge one of the principal wireless stations in an effort to answer the overtures of our neighbors in space.

But when, after two more days, the ethereal signals ceased abruptly and a week passed without their recurrence, Professor Whiteman's theory began to be derided, and the whole thing was dismissed as some temporary phenomenon of the atmosphere.

It was something of a shock, therefore, when, on the eighth night after the cessation of the disturbances, the calls were suddenly resumed—much louder than before, as if the power creating their electrical impulses had been increased. Now wireless stations all over the world plainly heard the staccato, mystifying challenge coming out of the ether.

This time, too, the interval between the signals was of a new length—eleven minutes and six seconds.

The next day the matter took on still further importance.

Scientists all along the Pacific Coast of the United States reported that in the night their seismographs had recorded a series of light earthquakes; and it was noted that these tremors had occurred precisely eleven minutes and six seconds apart—simultaneously with the sounding of the mysterious wireless calls!

After that the aerial signals did not stop during any part of the twenty-four hours. And the earth shocks continued, gradually increasing in severity. They kept perfect time with the signals through the ether—a shock for every whisper, a rest for every pause. In the course of a couple of weeks the quakes attained such force that in many places they could be distinctly felt by anyone standing still upon solid ground.

Science now became fully aware of the existence of some new and sinister—or at least unfathomed—force in the world, and began to give the matter profound study.

However, both Dr. Ferdinand Gresham and myself remained in complete ignorance of these events; for, as I have said, we were in the interior of Labrador. We both possessed a keen love of the wilderness, where, in vigorous sports, we renewed our energy for the work to be done in the cities—the doctor's as director of the great astronomical observatory at the National University; mine in the prosaic channels of business.

To the public, which knew him only through his books and lectures, Dr. Gresham perhaps appeared the last person in the world anyone would seek for a companion: a man silent, preoccupied, austere, unsociable. But underneath this aloofness and taciturnity was a character of rare strength, good nature and loveableness. And, once beyond the barriers of civilization, his austerity vanished, and he became a prince of good fellows, actually reveling in hardships and danger.

The complete change in him on such occasions brought to mind a strange phase of his life about which not even I, his most intimate associate, knew anything—a period in which he had undertaken a mysterious pilgrimage alone into the dark interior of China.

I only knew that fifteen years before he had gone in quest of certain amazing astronomical discoveries rumored to have been made by Buddhist savants dwelling in monasteries far back in the Himalayas or the Tian-Shan, or some of those inaccessible mountain fastnesses of Central Asia. After more than four years he had dragged back, ill and suffering, bearing hideous disfigurations upon his body, the look in his eyes of a man who had seen hell, and maintaining inviolate silence regarding his experiences.

On regaining his health after the Chinese adventure, he had immersed himself in silence and work, and year by year since then I had seen him steadily rise in prominence in his profession. Indeed, his name had come to stand for vastly more in the scientific world than merely the advancement of astronomical knowledge. He was a deep student along many lines of scientific endeavor—electricity, chemistry, mathematics, physics, geology, even biology. To the development of wireless telegraphy and the wireless transmission of electrical energy he had devoted particular effort.

The doctor and I had left New York a few days before the wireless disturb-

ances began. Returning by a small private vessel, which was not equipped with wireless, we continued in ignorance of the world's danger.

It was during our homeward sea voyage that the earthquakes began to grow serious. Many buildings were damaged. In the western portions of the United States and Canada a number of persons were killed by the collapse of houses.

Gradually the affected area expanded. New York and Nagasaki, Buenos Aires and Berlin, Vienna and Valparaiso began to take their places on the casualty list. Even modern skyscrapers suffered broken windows and falling plaster; sometimes they shook so violently that their occupants fled to the streets in a panic. Water and gas mains began to break.

Before long, in New York, one of the railroad tunnels under the Hudson River cracked and flooded, causing no loss of life, but spreading such alarm that all the tubes under and out of Manhattan were abandoned. This brought about a fearful congestion of traffic in the metropolis.

Finally, toward the beginning of August, the earthquakes became so serious that the newspapers were filled every day with accounts of the loss of scores—sometimes hundreds—of lives all over the world.

Then came a happening fraught with a monstrous new terror, which was revealed to the public one morning just as day dawned in New York.

During the preceding night, a great Atlantic liner, steaming westward approximately along the fiftieth parallel of latitude, had *run aground* about 700 miles east of Cape Race, Newfoundland—at a point where all nautical charts showed the ocean to be *nearly two miles deep!*

Within an hour there had come reports of a similar nature from other ships two or three hundred miles distant from the first one. There was no telling how vast in extent might be the upheaved portion of the sea bottom.

Hardly had the wireless stations finished taking these startling stories from midocean before there began to arrive equally strange reports from other quarters of the globe.

Someone discovered that the sea level had risen almost six feet at New York. The Sahara Desert had sunk to an unknown depth, and the sea was rushing in, ripping vast channels through the heart of Morocco, Tripoli and Egypt, obliterating cities and completely changing the whole face of the earth.

Within a few hours the high water in New York harbor receded about a foot. Mount Chimborazo, the majestic peak of more than 20,000 feet altitude in the Ecuadorean Andes, began to fall down and spread out over the surrounding country. Then the mountains bordering the Panama Canal started to collapse for many miles, completely blocking that famous waterway.

In Europe the Danube River ceased to flow in its accustomed direction and began, near its junction with the Save, to pour its waters back past Budapest and Vienna, turning the plains of western Austria into a series of spreading lakes.

The world awoke that summer morning to face a more desperate situation than ever had confronted mankind during all the centuries of recorded history.

And still no plausible explanation of the trouble—except the Martian theory of Professor Howard Whiteman—was forthcoming.

Men were dazed, astounded. A feeling of dread and terror began to settle upon the public.

At this juncture, realizing the need of some sort of action, the President of the United States urged all the other civilized nations to send representatives to an international scientific congress in Washington, which should endeavor to determine the origin of the terrestrial disturbances and, if possible, suggest relief.

As speedily as airplanes could bring them, an imposing assemblage of the world's leading scientists gathered in Washington.

Because of his international reputation and the fact that the congress held its sessions at the United States naval observatory of which he was chief, Professor Whiteman was chosen president of the body.

For a week the scientists debated—while the world waited in intense and growing anxiety. But the learned men accomplished nothing. They could not even agree. The battle seemed one of man against nature, and man was helpless.

In a gloomy state of mind they began to consider adjournment. At 10 o'clock on the night of the nineteenth of August the question of terminating the sessions was scheduled for a final vote.

That night, as the hands of the clock on the wall above the presiding officer's head drew near the fateful hour, the tension throughout the assemblage became intensely dramatic. Everyone present knew in his heart that further deliberation was useless, but the fate of the human race seemed to hang upon their decision.

Even after the sound of the clock's striking had died out upon the stillness of the room, Professor Whiteman remained seated; he seemed haggard and downcast. At last, however, he drew himself up and opened his lips to speak.

At that moment a secretary tiptoed swiftly in and whispered briefly to the presiding officer. Professor Whiteman gave a start and answered something that sent the secretary hurrying out.

Betraying strange emotion, the scientist now addressed the assemblage. His words came haltingly, as if he feared they would be greeted with ridicule.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a strange thing has happened. A few minutes ago—the wireless signals that have always accompanied the earthquakes ceased abruptly. In their place came—a mysterious summons out of the ether—whence no one knows—demanding a conversation with the presiding officer of this body. The sender of the message declares his communication has to do with the problem we have been trying to solve. Of course—this is probably some hoax—but our operator is greatly excited over the circumstances surrounding the call, and urges that we come to the wireless room at once!"

With one accord, everyone rose and moved forward.

Leading the way to another part of the observatory grounds, Professor Whiteman ushered the company into the operating room of the wireless plant—one of the most powerful in the world.

A little knot of observatory officials already was clustered about the operator, their manner denoting that something unusual had been going on.

At a word from Professor Whiteman, the operator threw over his rheostat and the hum of the rotary spark filled the room. Then his fingers played on the key while he sent out a few signals.

"I'm letting them — *him* — know you're ready, sir," the operator explained to the astronomer, in a tone filled with awe.

A few moments slipped by. Everyone waited breathlessly, all eyes glued upon the apparatus, as if to read the momentous message that was expected to come from—no one knew where.

Suddenly there was an involuntary movement of the muscles of the operator's face, as if he were straining to hear something very faint and far away; then he began writing slowly upon a pad that lay on his desk. At his elbow the scientists unceremoniously crowded each other in their eagerness to read:

**"To the Presiding Officer of the International Scientific Congress, Washington," he wrote. "I am the dictator of human destiny. Through control of the earth's internal forces I am master of every existing thing. I can blot out all life—destroy the globe itself. It is my intention to abolish all present governments and make myself emperor of the earth. As proof of my power to do this, I"—there was a pause of several seconds, which seemed like hours in the awful stillness—"I shall, at midnight tomorrow, Thursday (Washington time), cause the earthquakes to cease until further notice.**

**"KWO."**

## *CHAPTER II.*

## THE DICTATOR OF DESTINY.

BY THE next morning the entire civilized world knew of the strange and threatening communication from the self-styled "dictator of human destiny."

The members of the scientific congress had sought to keep the matter secret, but all the larger wireless stations of North America had picked up the message, and thence it found its way into the newspapers.

Ordinarily, such a communication would have attracted nothing more than laughter, as a harmless prank; but the increasing menace of the earthquakes had wrought a state of nervous tension that was ready to clothe the whole affair with sinister significance.

It was an alarmed and hysterical public that gathered in the streets of all the great cities soon after daylight. One question was on every tongue:

Who was this mysterious "KWO," and was his message actually a momentous declaration to the human race, or merely a hoax perpetrated by some person with an overly vivid imagination?

Even the signature to the communication was such as to arouse curiosity. Was it a name? Or a combination of initials? Or a title, like "Rex," signifying king? Or a nom de plume? Or the name of a place?

No one could say.

Anyone capable of discovering the secrets of the earth's internal forces, and harnessing those forces for his own ends, unquestionably was the most wonderful scientist the world had ever seen; but, though every important nation of the globe was represented at the scientific congress in Washington, not one of those representatives had ever heard of successful experiments along this line, or knew any prominent scientist named KWO, or one possessing initials that would make up that word. The name sounded Oriental, but certainly no country of the Orient had produced a scientist of sufficient genius to accomplish this miracle.

It was a problem concerning which the best-informed persons knew no more than the most untutored child, but one which was of paramount importance to the group of savants assembled in Washington. Until more light could be shed on this subject they were powerless to form any conclusions. Accordingly, their first effort was to get into further communication with their unknown correspondent.

All through the night the operator at the naval observatory's wireless plant in Washington sat at his key, calling over and over again the three letters that constituted mankind's only knowledge of its adversary:

"KWO—KWO—KWO!"

But there was no answer. Absolute silence enveloped the menacing power. "KWO" had spoken. He would not speak again. And after twelve hours even the most persistent members of the scientific body—who had remained constantly in the wireless room throughout the night—reluctantly desisted from further attempts at communication.

Even this failure found its way into the newspapers and helped to divide public opinion. Many persons and influential papers insisted that "KWO'S" threat was nothing more than a hoax. Others, however, were inclined to accept the message as the serious declaration of a human being with practically supernatural powers. In advancing this opinion they were supported by the undeniable fact that from the time the mysterious "KWO" began his efforts to communicate with the head of the scientific congress, until his message had been completed, the strange wireless signals accompanying the earth tremors had ceased entirely—a thing that had not happened before. When he was through speaking, the signals had resumed their clocklike recurrence. It was as if some power had deliberately cleared the ether for the transmission of this proclamation to mankind.

A feeling of dread—of monstrous uncertainty—hung over everyone and increased as the day wore on. Ordinary affairs were neglected, while the crowds in public places steadily increased.

By nightfall of Thursday even the loudest scoffers at the genuineness of the "dictator's" threat began to display symptoms of the general uneasiness.

Would the earthquakes begin to subside at midnight?

Upon the answer to this question hung the fate of the world.

It was an exceedingly hot night in most parts of the United States. Scarcely anywhere was a breath of air stirring; the whole country was blanketed by a suffocating wave of humidity. Low clouds that presaged rain—but never brought it—added to the general feeling of apprehension. It was as if all nature had conspired to furnish a dramatic setting for the events about to be enacted.

As midnight drew near the excitement became intense. In Europe, as well as in America, vast throngs filled the streets in front of the newspaper offices, watching the bulletin boards. The Consolidated News Syndicate had arranged special radio service from various scientific institutions—notably the Washington naval observatory, where savants were watching the delicate instruments for recording earth shocks—and any variation or subsidence in the tremors would be flashed to newspapers everywhere.

When the hands of the clocks reached a point equivalent to two minutes of midnight, Washington time, a vast hush fell upon the assembled thousands. The very atmosphere became aquiver with suspense.

But if the scene in the streets was exciting, that within the instrument room of the United States naval observatory, where the members of the international scientific congress waited was dramatic beyond description.

About the room sat the scientists and a couple of representatives from the Consolidated News. Professor Whiteman himself was stationed at the seismographs, while at his elbow sat Professor James Frisby, in direct telephone communication with the wireless operator in another part of the grounds.

The light was shaded and dim. The heat was stifling. Not a word was spoken. Scarcely a muscle moved. All were painfully alert.

Every eleven minutes and six seconds the building was shaken by a subterranean shock. The windows rattled. The floor creaked. Even the chairs seemed to lift and heave. It had been that way for weeks. But would this night see the end?

With maddening slowness, the hands of the big clock on the wall—its face illuminated by a tiny electric lamp—drew toward the hour of twelve.

Suddenly there came one of the earthquakes, that, while no different from its

predecessors, heightened the tension like the crack of a whip.

All eyes flew to the timepiece. It registered thirty-four seconds past 11:49 o'clock.

Therefore, the next tremor would occur at precisely forty seconds after midnight.

If the unknown "KWO" were an actual being, and kept his word—at that time the shocks would begin to subside!

The suspense became terrible. The faces of the scientists were drawn and pale. Beads of perspiration stood out on every brow. The minutes passed.

The electric correcting-device on the clock gave a sharp *click*, denoting midnight. Forty seconds more! The suffocating atmosphere seemed almost to turn cold under the pressure of anxiety.

Then, almost before anyone could realize it, the earthquake had come and gone! And not one particle of diminution in its violence had been felt!

A sigh of relief involuntarily passed around the room. Few moved or spoke, but there was a lessening of the strain on many faces. It was too soon yet, of course, to be sure, but—in most hearts there began to dawn a faint ray of hope that, after all, this "dictator of human destiny" might be a myth.

But suddenly Professor Frisby raised his hand to command quiet, and bent more intently over his telephone.

A short silence followed. Then he turned to the gentlemen and announced in a voice that seemed curiously dry:

"The operator reports that no wireless signal accompanied this last earthquake."

Again the nerve tension in the assembly leaped like an electric spark. Several more minutes passed in silence.

Then came another quake.

Had there been a decrease in its force? Opinion was divided.

All eyes sped to Professor Whiteman, but he remained absorbed at his seismographs.

In this silence and keen suspense eleven minutes and six seconds again dragged by. Another earthquake came and went. Once more Professor Frisby announced that there had been no wireless signal attending the tremor. The savants began to settle themselves for a further wait, when—

Professor Whiteman left his instrument and came slowly forward. In the dim light his face looked lined and gray. Before the rows of seats he stopped and faltered a moment. Then he said:

"Gentlemen, *the earthquakes are beginning to subside!*"

For a moment the scientists sat as if stunned. Everyone was too appalled to speak or move. Then the tension was broken by the rush of the Consolidated News men from the room to get their momentous tidings out to the world.

After that the ground shocks died out with increasing rapidity. In an hour they had ceased entirely, and the tortured planet once more was still.

But the tumult among the people had only started!

With a sudden shock the globe's inhabitants realized that they were in the grip of an unknown being endowed with supernatural power. Whether he were man or demi-god, sane or mad, well disposed or malignant—no one could guess. Where was his dwelling place, whence the source of his power, what would be the first manifestation of his authority, or how far would he seek to enforce his control? Only time could answer.

As this situation dawned upon men, their fears burst all bounds. Frantic excitement took possession of the throngs.

Only at the naval observatory in Washington was there calmness and restraint. The gathering of scientists spent the night in earnest deliberation of the course to be followed.

Finally it was decided that nothing should be done for the present; they would merely await events. When it had suited the mysterious "KWO" to announce himself to the world he had done so. Thereafter, communication with him had been impossible. Doubtless when he was ready to speak again he would break his silence—not before. It was reasonable to suppose that, now he had proved his power, he would not be long in stating his wishes or commands.

Events soon showed this surmise was correct.

Promptly at noon the next day—there having in the meantime been no recurrence of the earthquakes or electrical disturbances of the ether—the wireless at the naval observatory again received the mysterious call for the presiding officer of the scientific congress.

Professor Whiteman had remained at the observatory, in anticipation of such a summons, and soon he, with other leading members of the scientific assembly, was at the side of the operator in the wireless room.

Almost immediately after the call:

"KWO—KWO—KWO!"

went forth into the ether, there came a response and the operator started writing:

*"To the Presiding officer of the International Scientific Congress:*

*"Communicate this to the various governments of the earth:*

*"As a preliminary to the establishment of my sole rule throughout the world, the following demands must be complied with:*

*"First: All standing armies shall be disbanded, and every implement of warfare, of whatsoever nature, destroyed.*

*"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.*

*"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.*

*"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with, all the existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.*

*"In my next communication I will fix the date for the fulfillment of these demands.*

*"The alternative is the destruction of the globe.* *"KWO."*

It was on the evening of this eventful day that Dr. Gresham and I returned from Labrador. A little after 10 o'clock we landed in New York and, taking a taxicab at the pier, started for our bachelor quarters in apartments near each other west of Central Park.

As we reached the center of town we were amazed at the excited crowds that filled the streets and at the prodigious din raised by newsboys selling extras.

We stopped the car and bought papers. Huge black headings told the story at a glance. Also, at the bottom of the first page, we found a brief chronological summary of all that had happened, from the very beginning of the mysterious wireless signals three months before. We scanned it eagerly.

When I finished the newspaper article I turned to my companion—and was struck with horror at the change in his appearance!

He was crumpled down upon the seat of the taxi, and his face had taken on a ghastly hue. At first I though he had suffered a stroke. Only his eyes held a sign of life, and they seemed fixed on something far away—something too terrifying to be a part of the world around us.

Seizing him by the shoulders, I tried to arouse him, exclaiming:

"For heaven's sake! What is the matter?"

My words had no effect, so I shook him roughly.

Then he slowly began to come to his senses. His lips moved, without any sound passing them. But presently he found voice to murmur, as if talking in his sleep:

"It has come! The Seuen-H'sin—*the terrible Seuen-H'sin!*"

An instant later, with a great effort, he drew himself together and spoke sharply to the chauffeur:

"Quick! Never mind those addresses we gave you! Rush us to the Grand Central Station! *Hurry!*"

As the car suddenly swerved into a side street, I turned to the doctor.

"What's the matter? Where are you going?" I asked.

"To Washington!" he snapped, in reply to my second question. "As fast as we can get there!"

"In connection with this earthquake terror?" I inquired.

"Yes!" he told me; "for—"

There was a pause, and then he finished in a strange, awed voice:

"What the world has seen of this devil 'KWO' is only the faintest prelude to what may come—events so terrible, so utterly opposed to all human experience, that they would stagger the imagination! *This is the beginning of the dissolution of our planet!*"

## *CHAPTER III.*

## THE SORCERERS OF CHINA

"DOUBTLESS you never heard of the Seuen-H'sin."

The speaker was Dr. Ferdinand Gresham, and these were the first words he had uttered since we entered our private compartment on the midnight express for Washington, an hour before.

I lowered my cigar expectantly.

"No," I said; "never until you spoke the name in a momentary fit of illness this evening."

The doctor gave me a swift, searching glance, as if questioning what I might have learned. Presently he went to the door and looked out into the passage, apparently assuring himself no one was within hearing; then, locking the portal, he returned to his seat and said:

"So you never heard of the Seuen-H'sin—'The Sect of the Two Moons'? Then I will tell you: the Seuen-H'sin are the sorcerers of China, and the most murderously diabolical breed of human beings on this earth! They are the makers of these earthquakes that are aimed to wreck our world!"

The astronomer's declaration so dumfounded me that I could only stare at him, wondering if he were serious.

"The Seuen-H'sin are sorcerers," he repeated presently, "whose devilish power is shaking our planet to the core. And I say to you solemnly that this 'KWO'—who is Kwo-Sung-tao, high priest of the Seuen-H'sin—is a thousand times more dangerous than all the conquerors in history! Already he has absolute control of a hundred millions of people—mind and body, body and soul!—holding them enthralled by black arts so terrible that the civilized mind cannot conceive of them!"

Dr. Gresham leaned forward, his eyes shining brightly, his voice betraying deep emotion.

"Have you any idea," he demanded, "what goes on in the farthermost interior of China? Has *any* American or European?

"We read of a republic superseding her ancient monarchy, and we meet her students who are sent here to our schools. We hear of the expansion of our commerce along the jagged edges of that great Unknown, and we learn of Chinese railroad projects fostered by our financiers. But no human being in the outside world could possibly conceive what takes place in that gigantic shadow land—vague and vast as the midnight heavens—a continent unknown, impenetrable!

"Shut away in that remote interior—in a valley so little heard of that it is almost mythical—beyond trackless deserts and the loftiest mountains on the globe—this terrible sect of sorcerers has been growing in power for thousands of years, storing up secret energy that some day should inundate the world with horrors such as never have been known!

"And yet you never heard of the Seuen-H'sin! No; nor has any other Caucasian, except, perhaps, a chance missionary or two.

"But I tell you *I have seen them!*"

Dr. Gresham was becoming strangely excited, and his voice rose almost shrilly above the roar of the train.

"I have seen them," he went on. "I have crossed the Mountains of Fear, whose summits tower as high as from the earth to the moon, and I have watched the stars dance at night upon their glaciers. I have starved upon the dead plains of Dzun-Sz'chuen, and I have swum the River of Death. I have slept in the Caves of Nganhwiu, where the hot winds never cease and the dead light their campfires on their journey to Nirvana. And I have seen, too"—there was a strange, entranced look on his face as he spoke—"I have seen the Shadow of God on Tseih Hwan and K'eech-ch'a-gan! But in the end I have dwelt in Wu-yang!

"Wu-yang," he continued, after a brief pause, "is the center of the Seuen-H'sin—a wondrous dream city beside a lake whose waters are as opalescent as the sky at dawn; where the gardens are sweet-scented with a million blooms, and the air is filled with bird songs and the music of golden bells.

"But forgive me," sighed the doctor, rousing himself from his ecstatic train of thought; "I speak in the allegories of another land!"

We were silent for a time, until finally I suggested:

"And the Seuen-H'sin—The Sect of of the Two Moons?"

"Ah, yes," responded Dr. Gresham. "In Wu-yang the Beautiful I dwelt among them. For three years that city was my home. I labored in its workshops, studied in its schools, and—yes; I will admit it—I took part in those hellish ceremonies in the Temple of the Moon God—to save myself from death by fiendish torture. And, as my reward, I watched those devils at their miraculous business—*the making of another moon!*"

We smoked a moment in silence. Then:

"Surely," I objected, "you do not believe in miracles!"

"Miracles? Yes," he affirmed seriously—"miracles of science. For the sorcerers of China are scientists—the greatest that this world has yet produced! Talk to me of modern progress—our arts and sciences, our discoveries and inventions. Bah! They are child's play—clap-trap!—beside the accomplishments of this race of Chinese devils! We Americans boast of our Thomas Edison. Why, the Seuen-H'sin have a thousand Edisons!

"Think of it—thousands of years before Copernicus discovered that the earth revolves around the sun, Chinese astronomers understood the nature of our solar system and accurately computed the movements of the stars. The use of the magnetic compass was ancient even in those days. A thousand years before Columbus was born their navigators visited the western coast of North America and maintained colonies for a time. In the year 2657 B. C. savants of the Seuen-H'sin completed engineering projects on the Yellow River that never have been surpassed. And forty centuries before Christ the physicians of China practiced innoculation against smallpox and wrote erudite books on human anatomy.

"Scientists? Why, man alive, the Seuen-H'sin are the greatest scientists that ever lived! But they haven't the machinery or the materials or the factories that have made the Western nations great. There they are—shut up in their hidden valley, with no commercial incentives, no contact with the world, no desire but to study and experiment.

"Their scientific development through centuries beyond number has had only one object, which was the basis of their fanatical religion—the discovery of a means to split this earth and project an offshoot into space to form a second moon. And if our train stopped this minute you probably could feel them somewhere beneath you—hammering—hammering—hammering away at the world with their terrible and mysterious power, which even now it may be too late to stop!"

The astronomer rose and paced the length of the compartment, apparently so deep in thought that I was loath to disturb him. But finally I asked:

"Why do these sorcerers desire a second moon?"

Dr. Gresham resumed his seat and, lighting a fresh cigar, began:

"Numerous legends that are almost as old as the human race represent that the earth once had two moons. And not a few modern astronomers have held the same theory. Mars has two satellites, Uranus four, Jupiter five and Saturn ten. The supposition of these scientists is that the second satellite of the earth was shattered, and that its fragments are the meteors which occasionally encounter our world in their flight.

"Now, in the far, far distant past, before the days of Huang-ti and Yu—even before the time of the great semi-mythical kings, Yao and Shun—there ruled in China an emperor of peculiar fame—Ssu-chuan, the Universal.

"Ssu-chuan was a man of weak character and mediocre talents, but his reign was the greatest in all Chinese history, due to the intelligence and energy of his empress, Chwang-Keang.

"In those days, the legends tell us, the world possessed two moons.

"At the height of his prosperity Ssu-chuan fell in love with a very beautiful grl, called Mei-hsi, who became his mistress.

"The Empress Chwang-Keang was as plain as Mei-hsi was beautiful, and in time the mistress prevailed upon her lord to plot his wife's murder, so that Mei-hsi might be queen. Chwang-Keang was stabbed to death one evening in her garden.

"With her death begins the history of Seuen-H'sin.

"Simultaneous with the murder of the empress, one of the moons vanished from the sky. The Chinese legends say the spirit of the great ruler took refuge upon the satellite, which fled with her from sight of the earth. Modern astronomers say the satellite probably was shattered by an internal explosion.

"Now that the firm hand of Chwang-Keang was lifted from affairs of state, everything went wrong in China—until the country reverted virtually to savagery.

"At last Ssu-chuan aroused himself from his pleasures sufficiently to take alarm. He consulted his priests and seers, who assured him that heaven was angry because of the murder of Chwang-Keang. Never again, they said, would China know happiness or prosperity until the vanished moon returned, bringing the spirit of the dead empress to watch over the affairs of her beloved land. Upon her return, however, the glory of China would rise again, and the Son of Heaven would rule the world.

"Upon receiving these tidings, the legends relate, Ssu-chuan was consumed with pious zeal.

"Upon a lofty mountain behind the city he built the most magnificent temple in the world, and installed there a special priesthood to beseech heaven to restore the second moon. This priesthood was named the Seuen-H'sin, or Sect of the Two Moons. The worship of the Moon God was declared the state religion.

"Gradually the belief that the Seuen-H'sin was to restore the second moon—and that, when this happened, the Celestial Kingdom again would enjoy universal rule—became the fanatical faith of a fourth of China.

"But finally, in a fit of remorse, Ssu-chuan burnt himself alive in his palace.

"The empire of Ssu-chuan dissolved, but the Seuen-H'sin grew greater. Its high priest attained the most terrible and far-reaching power in China. But in the second century B. C., Shi-Hwang-ti, the great military emperor, made war upon the sorcerers and drove them across the Kuen-lun mountains. Still they retained great wealth and power; and in Wu-yang they made a city that is the dream spot of the world, equipped with splendid colleges for the study of astronomy and the sciences and magic.

"As astronomical knowledge increased among the Seuen-H'sin, they came to believe that the moon once was a part of the earth, having been blown out of the hollow now filled by the Pacific Ocean. In this theory certain eminent American and French astronomers lately have concurred.

"The Chinese sorcerers conceived the idea that by scientific means the earth again could be rent asunder, and its offshoot projected into space to form a second moon. Henceforth, all their labors were directed toward finding that means. And the lust for world domination became the religion of their race.

"When I dwelt among them they seemed to be drawing near their goal—and now they probably have reached it!

"But if we may judge from these demands of Kwo-Sung-tao, their plans for world conquest have taken a new and simpler turn: by threatening to use their mysterious force to dismember the globe they hope to subjugate mankind just as effectively as they expected to do by creating a second moon and fulfilling their prophecy. Why wreck the earth, if they can conquer it by threats?

"If they are able to enforce their demands it will not be long before civilization is face-to-face with those powers of evil that grind a quarter of China's millions beneath their ghastly rule—a rule of fanaticism and terror that would stun the world!"

Dr. Gresham paused and peered out the window. There was an unearthly look on his face when he again turned toward me.

"I have seen," he said, "those hideous powers of the Seuen-H'sin—things of horror such as the Western mind cannot conceive! When the beating of my heart shall cease forever, when my body has been buried in the grave, and when the Seuen-H'sin's torture scars"—he tore open his shirt and revealed frightful cicatrices upon his chest—"have vanished in the final dissolution, then, even then, I shall not forget those devils out of hell in Wu-yang, and I shall feel their power clutching at my soul!"

## *CHAPTER IV*

## DR. GRESHAM TAKES COMMAND

IT WAS shortly before dawn when we alighted from the train in Washington. Newsboys were calling extras:

"Terrible disaster! Nine thousand lives lost in Mississippi River!"

Purchasing copies of the papers, Dr. Gresham called a taxicab and directed the chauffeur to take us as rapidly as possible to the United States Naval Observatory in Georgetown. We read the news as we rode, along.

The great railroad bridge across the Mississippi River at St. Louis had collapsed, plunging three trains into the stream and drowning virtually all the passengers; and a few minutes later the Mississippi had ceased to flow past the city, pouring into a huge gap that sud-

denly had opened in the earth at a point about twenty-five miles northwest of the town.

Nearly everyone in St. Louis who could get an automobile had started for the point where the Mississippi was tumbling into the earth, and before long a vast crowd had assembled along the edges of the steaming chasm, watching the phenomenon.

Suddenly there had come a heavy shock underground and the crack had heaved nearly shut, sending a vast geyser, the full width of the stream, spouting a couple of thousand feet aloft. A few moments later this huge column of water had thundered back upon the river banks where the spectators were gathered, stunning and engulfing thousands. At the same time the gash had opened again and into it the torrent had swept the helpless multitude. Then it had closed once more and remained so, and the river had resumed its flow.

It was estimated that more than 9,000 persons had perished.

"Kwo-Sung-tao has stopped his earthquakes," remarked Dr. Gresham, when he had finished scanning the newspaper reports, "but irreparable damage has been done. Enough water doubtless has found its way into the heated interior of the globe to form a steam pressure that will play havoc."

Soon we drew up at the white-domed observatory crowning the wooded hill beyond Wisconsin Avenue. It was our good fortune to find Professor Howard Whiteman and several prominent members of the international scientific congress still there.

After a brief conversation with these gentlemen—to whom he was well known by reputation—Dr. Gresham drew Professor Whiteman and two of his chief assistants aside and began questioning them about the disturbances. He gave not the slightest hint of his knowledge of the Seuen-H'sin.

The doctor was particularly interested in every detail regarding the course taken by the quakes—whether or not all of them had come from the same direction, what that direction was, and how far away the point of origin seemed to be.

Professor Whiteman said the seismographs indicated the tremors all *had* come from one direction—a point somewhere to the northwest—and had traveled in a general southeasterly course. It was his opinion that the seat of the disturbances was about 3,000 miles distant—certainly not more than 4,000 miles.

This appeared greatly to surprise my companion and to upset whatever theories he might have in mind. Finally he asked to see all the data on the tremors, especially the actual seismograph records. At once we were taken to the building where these records were kept.

For more than an hour Dr. Gresham intently studied the charts and calculations, making new computations of his own and referring to numerous maps. But the longer he worked, the more puzzled he became.

Suddenly he looked up with an exclamation, and after seemingly weighing some new idea, he turned to me and said:

"Arthur, I need your help. Go to one of the newspaper offices and look through the files of old copies for an account of the capture of the Pacific Steamship *Nippon* by Chinese pirates. Try to find out what cargo the vessel carried. If the newspaper accounts do not give this, then try at the State Department. But hurry!"

We had kept our taxicab waiting, so I was soon speeding toward one of the newspaper offices on Pennsylvania Avenue. As I rode along I brought to mind the strange and terrible story of the great Pacific liner.

The *Nippon* was the newest and largest of the fleet of huge ships in service between San Francisco and the Orient. Fifteen months previous, while running from Nagasaki to Shanghai, across the entrance to the Yellow Sea, she had encountered a typhoon of such violence that one of her propeller shafts was damaged, and after the storm abated she was obliged to stop at sea for repairs.

It was an intensely dark, quiet night. About midnight the officer of the watch suddenly heard from the deck amidship a wild, long-drawn yell. Then all became quiet agan. As he started to descend from the bridge he heard bare feet pattering along the deck below. And then more cries arose forward—the most awful sounds. Rushing to his cabin, he seized a revolver and returned to the deck.

Surging over the rail at a dozen points were savage, half-naked yellow forms, gripping long, curved knives—the dreaded but almost-extinct Chinese pirates of the Yellow Sea. The fiends swiftly attacked a number of passengers who had been promenading about, murdering them in cold blood.

Meanwhile, other pirates were rushing to all parts of the ship.

As soon as he recovered from his first horrified shock, the officer leaped toward a group of the Chinamen and emptied his revolver into them. But the pirates far outnumbered the cartridges in his weapon, and when his last bullet had been fired several of the yellow devils darted at him with gleaming knives. Whereupon the officer turned and fled to the wireless operator's room nearby.

He got inside and fastened the heavy door just a second ahead of his pursuers. While the Chinamen were battering at the portal, he had the operator send out wireless calls for help, telling what was occurring on board.

Several ships and land stations picked up the strange story as far as I have related it, at which point the message ceased abruptly.

From that instant the *Nippon* vanished as completely as if she never had existed. Not one word ever again was heard of the vessel or of a single soul on board.

It required only a few minutes' search through the newspaper files to find the information I sought, and soon I was back at the observatory.

Dr. Gresham greeted me eagerly.

"The Steamship *Nippon*," I reported, "carried a cargo of American shoes, plows and lumber."

My friend's face fell with keen disappointment.

"What else?" he inquired. "Weren't there other things?"

"Lots of odds and ends," I replied —"pianos, automobiles, sewing machines, machinery—"

"*Machinery?*" the doctor shot out quickly. "What kind of machinery?"

I drew from my pocket the penciled notes I had made at the newspaper office and glanced over the items.

"Some electrical equipment," I answered. "Dynamos, turbines, switchboards, copper cable—all such things—for a hydro-electric plant near Hongkong."

"Ah!" exclamed the doctor in elation. "I was sure of it! We may be getting at the mystery at last!"

Seizing the memoranda, he ran his eyes hurriedly down the list of items. Profound confidence marked his bearing when he turned to Professor Whiteman a moment later and said:

"I must obtain an immediate audience with the President of the United States. You know him personally. Can you arrange it?"

Professor Whiteman could not conceal his surprise.

"Concerning these earthquakes?" he inquired.

"Yes!" my friend assured him.

The astronomer looked at his colleague keenly.

"I will see what I can do," he said. And he went off to a telephone.

In five minutes he was back.

"The President and his cabinet meet at 9 o'clock," announced the director. "You will be received at that hour."

Dr. Gresham looked at his watch. It was 8:30.

"If you will be so kind," said Dr. Gresham, "I would like to have you go with us to the President—and Sir William Belford, Monsieur Linne and the Duke de Rizzio as well, if they are still here. What we have to discuss is of the utmost importance to their governments, as well as to ours."

Professor Whiteman signified his own willingness to go, and went to hunt the other gentlemen.

This trio my friend had named comprised undoubtedly the leading minds of the international scientific congress. Sir William Belford was the great English physicist, head of the British delegation to the congress. Monsieur Camille Linne was the leader of the French group of scientists, a distinguished electrical expert. And the Duke de Rizzio was the famous Italian inventor and wireless telegraph authority, who headed the representatives from Rome.

The director soon returned with the three visitors, and we all hastened to the White House. Promptly at 9 o'clock we were ushered into the room where the nation's chief executive and his cabinet—all grim and careworn from a night of sleepless anxiety—were in session.

As briefly as possible, Dr. Gresham told the story of the Seuen-H'sin.

"It is their purpose," he concluded, "to crack open the earth's crust by these repeated shocks, so the water from the oceans will pour into the globe's interior. There, coming into contact with incandescent matter, steam will be generated until there is an explosion that will split the planet in two."

It is hardly to the discredit of the President and his advisers that they could not at once accept so fantastic a tale.

"How can these Chinamen produce an artificial quaking of the earth?" asked the President.

"That," replied the astronomer frankly, "I am not prepared to answer yet—although I have a strong suspicion of the method employed."

For the greater part of an hour the gentlemen questioned the astronomer. They did not express doubt of his veracity in his account of the Seuen-H'sin, but merely questioned his judgment in attributing to that sect the terrible power to control the internal forces of the earth.

"You are asking us," objected the Secretary of State, "virtually to return to the Dark Ages and believe in magicians and sorcerers and supernatural events!"

"Not at all!" returned the astronomer. "I am asking you to deal with modern facts—to grapple with scientific ideas that are so far ahead of our times the world is not prepared to accept them!"

"Then you believe that an unheard-of group of Chinamen, hiding in some remote corner of the globe, has developed a higher form of science than the brightest minds of all the civilized nations?" remarked the Attorney General.

"Events of the last few weeks seem to have demonstrated that," replied Dr. Gresham.

"But," protested the President, "if these Mongolians aim at splitting the globe to project a new moon into the sky, why should they be satisfied with an entirely different object—the acquisition of temporal power?"

"Because," the scientist informed him, "the acquisition of temporal power is their ultimate goal. Their only object in creating a second moon is to fulfill the prophecy that they should rule the earth again when two moons hung in the sky. If they can grasp universal rule *without* splitting the globe—merely by *threatening* to do so—they are very much the gainers."

The Secretary of the Navy next voiced a doubt.

"But it is evident," he remarked, "that if Kwo-Sung-tao makes the heavens fall, they will fall on his own head also!"

"Quite true," admitted the astronomer.

"Then," persisted the Secretary, "is it likely that human beings would plot the destruction of the earth when they knew it would involve them, too, in the ruin?"

"You forget," returned the doctor, "that we are dealing with a band of religious fanatics—undoubtedly the most irrational zealots that ever lived!

"Besides," he added, "the Seuen-H'sin, in spite of its threats, does not expect to destroy the world completely. It contemplates no more than the blowing of a fragment off into space."

"What, then, shall be done?" inquired the President.

"Place at my disposal one of the fastest destroyers of the Pacific fleet—equipped with certain scientific apparatus I shall devise—and let me deal with the Seuen-H'sin in my own way," announced the astronomer.

The gathering at once voiced vigorous objection.

"What you propose might mean war with China!" exclaimed the President.

"Not at all," was the answer. "It is possible not a single shot will be fired. And, in any event, we will not go anywhere near China."

The consternation of the officials increased.

"We shall not go near China," Dr. Gresham explained, "because I am certain the leaders of the Seuen-H'sin are no longer there. At this very hour, I am convinced, Kwo-Sung-tao and his devilish band are very much nearer to us than you dream!"

The gathering broke into excited discussion.

"After all," remarked Sir William Belford, "suppose this expedition *should* plunge us into hostilities. Unless something is done quickly, we are likely to meet a fate far worse than war!"

"I am willing to do anything necessary to remove this menace from the world—if the menace actually exists," the President stated. "But I am unable to convince myself that these wireless messages threatening mankind are not merely the emanations of a crank, who is taking advantage of conditions over which he has no control."

"But I maintain," argued Sir William, "that the sender of these messages *has* fully demonstrated his control over our planet. He prophesied a definite performance, and that prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. We cannot attribute its fulfillment to natural causes, nor to any human agency other than his. I say it is time we recognized his power, and dealt with him as best we may."

Several others now began to incline to this view.

Whereupon the Attorney General joined in the discussion with considerable warmth.

"I must protest," he interposed, "against what seems to me an extraordinary credulity upon the part of many of you gentlemen. I view this affair as a rational human being. Some natural phenomenon occurred to disturb the solidity of the earth's crust. That disturbance has ceased. Some joker or lunatic was lucky enough to strike it right with his prediction of this cessation—nothing more. The disturbance may never reappear. Or it may resume at any moment and end in a calamity. No one can foretell. But when you ask me to believe that these earthquakes were due to some human agency—that a mysterious bugaboo was responsible for them—I tell you *no!*"

Monsieur Linne had risen and was walking nervously up and down the

room. Presently he turned to the Attorney General and remarked:

"That is merely your opinion, sir. It is not proof. Why may these earthquakes not be due to some human agency? Have we not begun to solve all the mysteries of nature? A few years ago it was inconceivable that electricity could ever be used for power, heat and light. May not many of the inconceivable things of today be the commonplace realities of tomorrow? We have earthquakes. Is it beyond imagination that the forces which produce them can be controlled?"

"Still," returned the Attorney General vigorously, "my answer is that we have no adequate reason for attributing either the appearance or the cessation of these earthquakes to any human power! And I am unalterably opposed to making the government of the United States ridiculous by fitting out a naval expedition to combat a phantom adversary."

Dr. Gresham now had risen and was standing behind his chair, his face flushed and his eyes shining. At this point he broke sharply into the discussion, the cold, cutting force of his words leaving no doubt of his decision.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I did not come here to *argue;* I came to *help!* As surely as I am standing here, our world is upon the brink of dissolution! And I alone may be able to save it! But, if I am to do so, you must agree absolutely to the course of action I propose!"

He glanced at his watch. It was 10 o'clock.

"At noon," he announced, in tones of finality, "I shall return for my answer!"

And he turned and started for the door.

In the tenseness of those last few moments, almost no one had been conscious of the soft buzzing of the President's telephone signal, or of the fact that the executive had removed the receiver and was listening into the instrument.

Now, as Dr. Gresham reached the door, the President lifted a hand in a commanding gesture and cried: "Wait!"

The astronomer turned back into the room.

For a minute, perhaps, the President listened at the telephone; and as he did so the expression of his face underwent a grave change. Then, telling the person at the other end of the wire to wait, he addressed the gathering:

"The naval observatory at Georgetown is on the 'phone. There has just been another communication from 'KWO.' It says—"

The executive again spoke into the telephone: "Read the message once more, please!"

After a few seconds, speaking slowly, he repeated:

*"'To the President Officer of the International Scientific Congress:*

*"'I hereby set the hour of noon, on the twenty-fifth day of the next month, September, as the time when I shall require compliance with the first three demands of my last communication. The fulfillment of the fourth demand—the resignation of all the existing governments—therefore, will take place on the twenty-eighth day of September.*

*"'In order to facilitate the execution of my plans, I shall require an answer by midnight next Saturday, one week from today, from the governments of the world as to whether they will comply with my terms of surrender. In the absence of a favorable reply by that time, I shall terminate, absolutely and forever, all negotiations with the human race, and shall cause the earthquakes to resume and continue with increasing violence until the earth is shattered. "'KWO.'"*

When the President finished reading and hung up the telephone, a deathlike silence fell upon the gathering. Dr. Gresham, standing by the door, made no further movement to depart.

The President glanced at the faces about him, as if seeking some solution of the problem. But no aid was forthcoming from that source.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a chair being pushed back from the table, and Sir William Belford rose to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is no time for hesitation. If the United States does not immediately grant Dr. Gresham's request for a naval expedition against the Seuen-H'sin, Great Britain *will* do so!"

At once Monsieur Linne spoke up: "And that is the attitude of France!"

The Duke de Rizzio nodded, as if in acquiescence.

Without further hesitation, the President announced his decision.

"I will take the responsibility for acting first and explaining to Congress afterward," he said. And, turning to the Secretary of the Navy, he added:

"Please see that Dr. Gresham gets whatever ships, men, money and supplies he needs—without delay!"

## *CHAPTER V.*

### BEGINNING A STRANGE VOYAGE

IMMEDIATELY after obtaining the President's permission to combat the Seuen-H'sin, Dr. Ferdinand Gresham went into conference with the Secretary of the Navy and his aides. Soon telegraphic orders flew thick and fast from Washington, and before nightfall two high naval officers left the capital for San Francisco personally to expedite arrangements for the expedition.

Meanwhile, the doctor hurried me back to New York with instructions to visit the electrical concern that had manufactured the dynamos and other equipment that had been aboard the Steamship *Nippon,* and obtain all the information possible about this machinery. This I did without difficulty.

The government arranged with a big electrical machinery firm to place a section of its plant at Dr. Gresham's disposal, and as soon as the astronomer returned to New York he plunged into feverish activity at this shop, personally superintending the construction of his paraphernalia.

As fast as this apparatus was completed it was rushed off by airplane to the Mare Island Navy Yard at San Francisco.

It had already been settled that I was to accompany the doctor on his expedition, so my friend availed himself of my services for many tasks. Some of these struck me as most odd.

I had to purchase a large quantity of fine silks of brilliant hues, mostly orange, blue and violet; also a supply of grease paints and other materials for theatrical make-up. These articles were sent to Mare Island with the scientific equipment.

Day by day, the week which "KWO" had granted the world to announce its surrender slipped by. During this period the utmost secrecy was maintained regarding the projected naval expedition. The public knew nothing of the strange story of the sorcerers of China. Anxiety was universal and acute.

Many persons favored surrender to the would-be "emperor of the earth," arguing that any person who proposed to abolish war, possessed a greatness of spirit far beyond any known statesman; they were willing to entrust the future of the world to such a dictator. Others contended that the demand for destruction of all implements of war was merely a precautionary measure against resistance to tyranny.

Dr. Gresham urged to the authorities at Washington that in dealing with so unscrupulous and inhuman a foe as the

sorcerers, equally unscrupulous methods were justified. He proposed that the nations inform "KWO" they would surrender, which would ward off the immediate resumption of the earthquakes and give the naval expedition time to accomplish its work.

But the governments could not agree upon any course of action; and in this state of indecision the last day of grace drew toward its close.

As midnight approached, vast crowds assembled about the newspaper offices, eager to learn what was going to happen.

At last the fateful hour came—and passed in silence. The world had failed to concede its surrender.

Five minutes more slipped into eternity.

Then there was a sudden stir as bulletins appeared. Their message was brief. At three minutes past 12 o'clock the wireless at the United States Naval Observatory had received this communication:

*"To All Mankind:*

*"I have given the world an opportunity to continue in peace and prosperity. My offer has been rejected. The responsibility is upon your own heads. This is my final message to the human race.*

*"KWO."*

Within an hour the earthquakes resumed. And they were repeated, as before, exactly eleven minutes and six seconds apart.

With their reappearance vanished the last vestige of doubt that the terrestrial disturbances were due to human agency—to a being powerful enough to do what he chose with the planet.

By the end of three days it was noticed that the shocks were increasing in violence much swifter than previously, as if the earth's crust had been so weakened that it could no longer resist the hammering.

At this juncture Dr. Gresham announced that he was ready to leave for the Pacific Coast. The government had one of its giant mail planes waiting at an aviation field on Long Island, and in its comfortable enclosed interior we were whisked across the continent.

In less than two days we alighted at the Mare Island Navy Yard, where the *Albatross,* the destroyer that was to serve for our expedition, lay at our disposal.

The *Albatross* was the newest, largest and fastest destroyer of the Pacific fleet—an oil-burning craft carrying a crew of 117 men.

Most of the boxes and crates of material that we had sent from New York being already on deck, the astronomer immediately went to work with a corps of the navy's electricians to assemble his apparatus.

I was sent off to find six men tailors, all familiar with the making of theatrical costumes, who were willing to undertake a mysterious and dangerous sea voyage; also two actors skilled in make-up.

All during this time the earthquakes never varied from their interval of eleven minutes and six seconds, and the seriousness of affairs throughout the world continued to grow. In Europe and America deep fissures, sometimes hundreds of miles long, now appeared in the ground. Gradually it became apparent that these cracks in the earth's crust were confined within a definite area, which roughly formed a circle touching the Mississippi River on the west and Serbia on the east.

Then, on the morning after our arrival in San Francisco, half a dozen noted scientists—none of whom, however, belonged to the little group that had been taken into Dr. Gresham's confidence regarding the Seuen-H'sin—issued a warning to the public.

They prophesied that the world soon would be rent by an explosion, and that the portion within the circular area already outlined would be blown away into space or would be pulverized.

Nearly one-fifth of the entire surface of the earth was included in this doomed circle, embracing the most civilized countries of the globe—the eastern half of the United States and Canada; all of the British Isles, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland and Denmark; and most of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Brazil. Here, too, were located the world's greatest cities—New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Chicago, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia.

The scientists urged the people of the eastern United States and Canada to flee immediately beyond the Rocky Mountains, while the inhabitants of western Europe were advised to take refuge east of the Carpathians.

The first result of this warning was simply to daze the public. But in a few hours the true character of the predicted happenings dawned upon people in full force. Then terror—blind, sickening, unreasoning terror—seized the masses, and there began the most gigantic and terrible exodus in the history of the earth—a migration that in a few hours developed into a mad race of half the planet's inhabitants across thousands of miles.

Transportation systems were seized by the frenzied throngs and rendered useless in the jam. People started frantically in airplanes, automobiles, horsedrawn vehicles—even on foot. All restraints of law and order vanished in the hideous struggle of "every man for himself."

At last, toward midnight of this day, Dr. Gresham finished his work. Together we made a final tour of inspection through the ship—which gave me my first opportunity to see most of the scientific paraphernalia the doctor had constructed.

Electrical equipment was scattered everywhere—several big generators, a whole battery of huge induction coils, submarine telephones, switchboards with strange clocklike devices mounted upon them, and reels of heavy copper wire.

One thing that particularly attracted my attention was an instrument at the very bottom of the ship's hold. It looked like the seismographs used on land for recording earthquakes. I observed, too, that the wireless telegraph equipment of the destroyer had been much enlarged, giving it an exceedingly wide radius.

The crated parts of two hydroplanes lay on deck, besides half a dozen light, portable mountain mortars, with a quantity of high-explosive ammunition.

At the finish of our inspection, the doctor sought Commander Mitchell, the vessel's chief officer, and announced:

"You may start at once—on the course I have outlined."

A few minutes later we were silently speeding toward the Golden Gate.

Dr. Gresham and myself then went to bed.

When we awoke the next morning we were out of sight of land and were steaming at full speed north in the Pacific Ocean.

## *CHAPTER VI*

## THE COASTS OF MYSTERY

HOUR after hour the destroyer kept up her furious pace almost due north in the Pacific. We never came in sight of land, and it was impossible for me to guess whence we were bound.

Throughout the first day Dr. Gresham remained in his stateroom—silent, troubled, buried in a mass of arithmetical calculations.

In another part of the ship the six tailors I had brought on board labored diligently upon a number of Chinese

costumes, the designs for which the doctor had sketched for them.

And on deck a detail of men was busy unpacking and assembling one of the two hyroplanes.

By the middle of the second day Dr. Gresham laid aside his calculations and began to display the keenest interest in the details of the voyage. About midnight he had the ship stopped, although neither land nor any other craft was in sight; whereupon he went to the hold and studied the hydro-seismographs. To my surprise I saw that, although we were adrift upon the restless ocean, the instrument was recording tremors similar to earthquakes on land. These occurred precisely eleven minutes and six seconds apart.

Seeing my astonishment, the doctor explained:

"It is possible to record earth shocks even at sea. The ocean bed imparts the jar to the water, through which the tremor continues like the wave caused by throwing a stone into a pond."

But the thing which seemed to interest my friend most was that these shocks now appeared to be originating at some point to the northeast of us, instead of to the northwest, as we had noted them in Washington.

Soon he ordered the vessel started again, this time on a northeasterly course, and the next morning we were close to land.

Dr. Gresham, who at last had begun to throw off his taciturn mood, told me this was the coast of the almost unsettled province of Cassiar, in British Columbia. Later, as we began to pass behind some rugged islands, he said we were entering Fitz Hugh Sound, a part of the "inland passage" to Alaska. We were now approximately 300 miles northwest of the city of Vancouver.

"Somewhere, not far to the north of here," added the doctor, "is 'The Country of the Great Han,' where Chinese navigators, directed by Huei-Sen, a Buddhist priest, landed and founded colonies in the year 499 A. D. You will find it all recorded in 'The Book of Changes,' which was written in the reign of Tai-ming, in the dynasty of Yung: how, between the years 499 and 556, Chinese adventurers made many trips across the Pacific to these colonies, bringing to the wild inhabitants the laws of Buddha, his sacred books and images; building stone temples; and causing at last the rudeness of the natives' customs to disappear."

With this my friend left me, upon some summons from the ship's commander, and I could learn no more.

The region into which we were now penetrating was one of the wildest and loneliest on the North American continent. The whole coastline was fringed by a chain of islands—the tops of a submerged mountain range. Between these islands and the continent extended a maze of deep, narrow channels, some of which connected in a continuous inland waterway. The mainland was a wilderness of lofty peaks, penetrated at intervals by tortuous fiords, which, according to the charts, sometimes extended erratically inland for a hundred miles or more. Back from the coast a few miles, we could see the elevated gorges of the main range filled with glaciers, and occasionally one of these gigantic rivers of ice pushed out to the Sound, where its face broke away in an endless flotilla of icebergs.

The only dwellers in this region were the few inhabitants of the tiny Indian fishing villages, scattered many miles apart; and even of these we saw not a sign throughout the day.

Toward nightfall the doctor had the *Albatross* drop anchor in a quiet lagoon, and the hydroplane that had been assembled on deck was lowered to the water.

It now lacked two nights of the period of full moon, and the nearly round satellite hung well overhead as darkness fell, furnishing, in that clear atmosphere, a beautiful illumination in which every detail of the surrounding mountains stood forth.

As soon as the last trace of daylight had vanished, Dr. Gresham, equipped with a pair of powerful binoculars, appeared on deck, accompanied by an aviator. He said nothing about where he was going; and, knowing his moods so intimately, I realized it was useless to seek information until he volunteered it. But he handed me a large sealed envelope, remarking:

"I am going for a trip that may take all night. In case I should not return by sun-up you will know something has happened to me, and you are to open this envelope and have Commander Mitchell act upon the instructions it contains."

With this, he gave me a firm handclasp that plainly was meant for a possible farewell, and followed the aviator into the plane. In a few moments they were off, their new type of noiseless motor making scarcely a sound, and soon were climbing towards the summits of the snow-crowned peaks to the eastward. Almost before we realized it, they were lost from sight.

It was my intention to keep watch through the night for the return of my friend; but after several hours I fell asleep and knew no more until dawn was reddening the mountaintops. Then the throbbing of the destroyer's engines awakened me, and I hurried on deck to find Dr. Gresham himself giving orders for the vessel's movements.

The scientist never once referred to the events of the night as he partook of a light breakfast and went to bed. However, I could tell by his manner that he had not met with success.

Slowly the ship continued northward most of that day, through the awesome fastnesses of Fitz Hugh Sound, until we reached the mouth of a grim fiord set down on the charts as Dean Channel. Here we cast anchor.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Gresham put in his appearance, viewed the mainland through his glasses, and then went into the ship's hold to study his earthquake recorder. What he observed apparently pleased him.

This night also was moonlit and crystal-clear; and, as before, when daylight had departed, the doctor reminded me of the sealed orders I held against his failure to return at sunrise, bade me farewell, and started off in the airship, flying straight toward the range of peaks that walled the eastern world.

On this occasion a series of remarkable happenings removed all difficulty of my keeping awake.

About 10 o'clock, when I chanced to be visiting in the commander's cabin, an officer came and informed us of some strange lights that had been observed above the mountains at a distance inland. We went on deck and, sure enough, beheld a peculiar and inexplicable phenomenon.

To the northeast the heavens were illuminated at intervals by flashes of white light extending, fan-shaped, far overhead. The display was as brilliant and beautiful as it was mysterious. For a good while we watched it—until I was suddenly struck with the regularity of the intervals between the flashes. Timing the lights with my watch, I found they occurred *precisely eleven minutes and six seconds apart!*

With a new idea in mind, I made a note of the exact instant when each flash appeared; then I went down into the hold of the ship and looked at Dr. Gresham's hydro-seismograph. As I suspected, the aerial flashes had occurred simultaneously with the earthquakes.

When I returned to the deck the phenomenon in the sky had ceased, and it did not appear again all night.

But shortly after midnight another portentous event occurred to claim undivided attention.

The powerful wireless of the *Albatross,* which could hear messages coming and going throughout the United States and Canada, as well as over a great part of the Pacific Ocean, began to pick up accounts of terrible happenings all over the world. The fissures in the ground, which had appeared shortly before we left San Francisco, had suddenly widened and lengthened into a nearly-unbroken ring about the portion of the globe from which the inhabitants had been warned to flee. Within this danger-circle the ground had begun to vibrate heavily and continuously—as the lid of a tea kettle "dances" when the pressure of steam beneath it is seeking a vent.

The flight of the public from the doomed area had grown into an appalling hegira—until a fresh disaster, a few hours ago, had suddenly cut it short: the Rocky Mountains had begun to fall down throughout most of their extent, obliterating all the railroads and other highways that penetrated their chain. Now the way to safety beyond the mountains was hopelessly blocked.

And with this catastrophe hell had broken loose among the people of America!

It was near dawn before these stories ceased. The officers and myself were still discussing them when day broke and we beheld Dr. Gresham's hydroplane circling high overhead, seeking a landing. In a few minutes the doctor was with us.

The instant I set eyes on him I knew he had met with some degree of success. But he said nothing until we were alone and I had poured out the tale of the night's happenings.

"So you saw the flashes?" remarked the doctor.

"We were greatly puzzled by them," I admitted. "And you?"

"I was directly above them and saw them made," he announced.

"Saw them *made?*" I repeated.

"Yes," he assured me; "indeed, I have had a most interesting trip. I would have taken you with me, only it would have increased the danger, without serving any purpose. However, I am going on another jaunt tonight, in which you might care to join me."

I told him I was most eager to do so.

"Very well," he approved; "then you had better go to bed and get all the rest you can, for our adventure will not be child's play."

The doctor then sought the ship's commander and asked him to proceed very slowly up the deep and winding Dean Channel, keeping a sharp lookout ahead. As soon as the vessel started we went to bed.

It was mid-afternoon when we awakened. Looking out our cabin portholes, we saw we were moving slowly past lofty granite precipices that were so close it seemed we might almost reach out and touch them. Quickly we got on deck.

Upon being informed that we had gone about seventy-five miles up Dean Channel, Dr. Gresham stationed himself on the bridge wth a pair of powerful glasses, and for several hours gave the closest scrutiny ahead, as new vistas of the tortuous waterway unfolded.

We now seemed to be passing directly into the heart of the lofty Cascade Mountain range that runs the length of Cassiar Province in British Columbia. At times the cliffs bordering the fiord drew in so close that it seemed we had reached the end of the channel, while again they rounded out into graceful slopes thickly carpeted with pines. Still there was no sign that the foot of man ever had trod this wilderness.

Late in the afternoon Dr. Gresham became very nervous, and toward twilight he had the ship stopped and a launch lowered.

"We will start at once," he told me, "and Commander Mitchell will go with us."

Taking from me the sealed letter of instructions he had left in my care before starting on his airplane trips the previous nights, he handed it to the commander, saying: "Give this to the officer you leave in charge of the ship. It is his orders in case anything should happen to us and we do not return by morning. Also, please triple the strength of the night watch. Run your vessel close under the shadows of the bank, and keep her pitch dark. We are now in the heart of the enemy's country, and we can't tell what sort of a lookout he may be keeping."

While Commander Mitchell was attending to these orders, the doctor sent me below to get a pair of revolvers for each of us. When I returned the three of us entered the launch and put off up the channel.

Slowly and noiselessly we moved ahead in the gathering shadows near shore. The astronomer sat in the bow, silent and alert, gazing constantly ahead through his glasses.

We had proceeded scarcely fifteen minutes when the doctor suddenly ordered the launch stopped. Handing his binoculars to me and pointing ahead beyond a sharp bend we were just rounding, he exclaimed excitedly:

"*Look!*"

I did so, and to my astonishment saw a great steamship lying at a wharf!

Commander Mitchell now had brought his glasses into use, and a moment later he leaped to his feet, exclaiming:

"My God, men! *That's the vanished Pacific liner Nippon!*"

An instant more and I also had discerned the name, standing out in white letters against the black stern. Soon I made a second discovery that thrilled me with amazement: faint columns of smoke were rising from the vessel's funnels, as if she were manned by a crew and ready to sail!

Dr. Gresham was the first to speak; his excitement now had left him, and he was cool and commanding.

"Let us get back to the *Albatross,*" he said, "as quickly as we can!"

On board the destroyer, the doctor again cautioned Commander Mitchell about keeping a sharp lookout and allowing no lights anywhere.

Then the scientist and I hastened to our cabin, where Chinese suits of gorgeous silk had been laid out for us; they were part of the quantity of such garments my six tailors had been making. There were two outfits for each—one of flaming orange, which we put on first, and one of dark blue, which we slipped on over the other. Then one of the actors was summoned, and he made up our faces so skillfully that it would have been difficult to distinguish us from Chinamen.

When the actor had left the room, the doctor handed me the revolvers I had carried before, and also a long, villainous-looking knife. To these he added a pair of field glasses. After similarly arming himself, he announced:

"I feel I must warn you, Arthur, that this trip may be the most perilous of your whole life. All the chances are against our living to see tomorrow's sun, and if we die it is likely to be by the most fiendish torture ever devised by human beings! Think well before you start!"

I promptly assured him I was willing to go wherever he might lead.

"But where," I asked, " is that to be?"

"We are going," he answered, "into the hell-pits of the Seuen-H'sin!"

And with that we entered the launch and put off into the coming darkness.

## *CHAPTER VII.*

### THE MOON GOD'S TEMPLE

IT WAS not long before the launch again brought us within sight of the mystery ship, the *Nippon.*

Here we landed and had the seaman take the launch back to the destroyer. With a final inspection of our revolvers and knives, we started forward through the rocks and timber toward the vessel.

It was the night of the full moon, but the satellite had not yet risen above the mountains to the east, so we had only the soft gleam of the stars to light us on our way. In spite of the northern latitude, it was not uncomfortably cold, and soon we were spellbound by the gorgeous panorama of the night. Above us, through the lattice-work of boughs, the calm, cold stars moved majestically across the black immensity of space. The dark was fragrant with the scent of pines. Strangely hushed and still the universe appeared, as if in the silence world were whispering to world.

We could now feel the periodic earthquakes very plainly—as if we were directly over the seat of the disturbances.

In a few minutes we reached the edge of the clearing about the *Nippon's* wharf. There were no buildings, so we had an unobstructed view of the vessel, lying tied to the dock. Two or three lights shone faintly from her portholes, but no one was visible about her.

The wharf was at the entrance to a little side valley that ran off to the southeast through a break in the precipitous wall of the fiord. From this ravine poured a turbulent mountain stream which, I recalled from the ship's charts, was named Dean River.

After a brief look around we discovered a wide, smooth roadway leading from the wharf into the valley, paralleling the stream. Keeping a cautious lookout, we began to follow this road, slipping along through the timber at its side.

In about five minutes we came to a coal mine on the slope beside the highway. From the looks of its dump, it was being worked constantly—probably furnishing the fuel to keep fire under the *Nippon's* boilers.

Fifteen more minutes passed in laborious climbing over rocks and fallen timber, when all at once, after ascending a slight rise to another level of the valley's floor, we beheld the lights of a village a short distance beyond! At once Dr. Gresham changed our course to take us up the mountainside, whence we could look down upon the settlement.

To my amazement, we saw a neatly laid out town of more than a hundred houses, with electric-lighted streets. Although the houses seemed to be built entirely of corrugated sheet iron—probably because a more substantial type of construction would not have withstood the earthquakes—there was about the place an indefinable Chinese atmosphere.

My first shock of surprise at coming across this hidden city soon gave way to wonder that the outside world knew nothing of such a place—that it was not even indicated on the maps. But I recalled that on the land side it was unapproachable because of lofty mountains, beyond which lay an immense trackless wilderness; and on the water side it was a hundred miles off even the navigation lanes to Alaska.

Suddenly, as we stood there in the timber, a deep-toned bell began to toll on the summit of the low mountain above us.

"The Temple of the Moon God!" exclaimed Dr. Gresham.

With the sounding of the bell, the village awakened into life. From nearly every house came figures clad in flaming orange costumes, exactly like the ones Dr. Gresham and myself wore beneath our outer suits. At the end of the town these figures mingled and turned into a roadway, and a few moments later we saw they were coming up the hill directly toward us!

Not knowing which way they would pass, we crouched in the dark and waited.

Still the weird, mellow tocsin sounded above us—slowly, mystically, flooding the valley with somber, thrilling sound.

All at once we heard the tramping of many feet, and then perceived with alarm that the roadway up the mountainside passed not more than twenty feet from where we lay! Along it the silent, strange procession was mounting the slope!

"The Seuen-H'sin," whispered my companion, "on their way to the hellish temple rites!"

Scarcely breathing, we pressed flat upon the ground, fearful each instant we might be discovered. For a period that seemed interminable the brilliantly-clad figures continued to shuffle by—hundreds of them. But at last there was an end of the marchers.

Immediately Dr. Gresham rose and, motioning me to follow his example, quickly slipped off his blue outer costume and rolled it into a small bundle, which he tucked under his arm. I was ready an instant later.

Creeping out to the road, we peered about to make certain no stragglers were approaching; then we hurried after the ascending throng. It was only a few moments until we overtook the rear ranks, whereupon we adopted their gait and followed silently, apparently attracting no attention.

The mountain was not very high, and at last we came out upon a spacious level area at the top. It was moderately well illuminated by electric lamps, and at the eastern end, near the edge of the eminence, we beheld a stone temple into which the multitude was passing. Depositing our rolls of outer clothing in a spot where we could easily find them again, we moved forward.

As we crossed the walled mountaintop, or temple courtyard it might be called, I swiftly took in the strange surroundings. The temple was a thing to marvel at. It was all of stone, with high, fantastically-carved walls and an imposing facade of rounded columns. On either side of the central structure were wings, or side halls, that ran off into the darkness; and in front of these were walled courtyards with arched gateways, roofed with golden-yellow tiles. The structure must have required engineering skill of the highest order for its building, yet it appeared old, incredibly old, as if the storms of centuries had beaten upon it.

Everywhere about the walls were cracks—doubtless the result of the earthquakes—so numerous and pronounced that one wondered how the building held together.

Presently, as we advanced, I noticed an overturned and broken statue of Buddha, the stone figure partly overgrown with moss and lichens. As I studied this I recalled the bit of history Dr. Gresham had related to me a couple of days before as we journeyed northward on the *Albatross*—of the Chinese navigators, directed by Huei-Sen, a Buddhist monk, who had come "somewhere to the north" in the year 499 A. D. And I wondered if this was, indeed, the "Country of the Great Han" that was discovered by these Orientals in the long ago—if this might be one of the temples which Huei-Sen and his followers had built in the days a thousand years before Columbus.

I whispered these questions to the doctor.

With an alarmed glance about us to make sure I had not been overheard, he answered very low:

"You have guessed it! But keep silent, as you value your life! Stay close to me and do whatever the others do!"

We were now at the entrance to the temple. Heavy yellow curtains covered the portal, and within a gong droned slowly.

Summoning courage, we pushed aside the draperies and entered.

The place was large and dimly lighted. Low red seats ran crossways in long rows. At the far end, against the east wall, was the altar, before which were drawn deep yellow hangings. In front of these, under a hood of golden gauze, burned a solitary light. There was a

terror in this mysterious dusk that gave me a strange thrill.

The audience was standing, silent, with bowed heads, by the rows of seats. Quaking inwardly, we took places in the last row, where the light was dimmest. So perfectly were our costumes and make-up a match for those around us that we attracted no attention.

All at once the tempo of the gong's droning changed, becoming slower and more weird, and other gongs joined in at intervals. The illumination, which appeared to come solely from the ceiling, brightened somewhat.

Then a door opened on the right, about midway of the building, and there appeared a being such as I never beheld before. He was tall and lean and wore a robe of golden silk. Behind him came another—a priest in superb violet; and behind him a third in flaming orange. They wore high helmets with feathery plumes.

In the hands of each priest were peculiar instruments—or images, if so they might be called. Above a handle about two feet long, held vertically, was a thin rod curved upward in a semicircle, at each end of which was a flat disk about a foot in diameter—one disk of silver, the other of gold. As I scrutinized these emblems I wondered if they were meant to symbolize the Seuen-H'sin's belief in two moons.

Slowly the priests advanced to a central aisle, then forward to an open space, or hall of prayer, before the altar.

Then a door opened on the left, opposite the first portal, and from it issued a fourth priest in robes of richest purple, followed by another in crimson, and still another in wondrous green. They, also, wore the high, feathery helmets and carried the instruments with gold and silver disks.

When the last three had joined the first trio, other portals opened along the sides of the temple and half a dozen more priests entered and strode forward. The brilliant colors of their frocks seemed a part of the devilish gong-droning. In the dim vastness of the temple they moved on, silent as ghosts. There was something singularly depressing in the slow, noiseless steps. It was as if they were walking to their death.

Still the procession grew in numbers. Hitherto unnoticed portals gave entrance to more yellow, orange and violet-clad priests—demoniacal-looking beings, with lean, cruel, thoughtful faces and somber, dreaming eyes.

At last the procession ended. There was a pause, after which the audience standing among the rows of red seats burst into low murmurs of supplication. Sometimes the voices rose into a considerable humming sound; again they sank into a whisper. Suddenly the murmur of voices ceased and there was a blare of unseen trumpets—a crashing vastness of sound; harsh, unearthly, infernal, so that I shivered in horror. Nothing could be seen of the terrible orchestra; its notes seemed to come from a dark adjoining hall.

Again there was a pause—a thrilling period in which even the droning gongs were hushed; and then from an unseen portal came, slowly and alone, a figure that all the rest seemed to have been waiting for.

Leaning close to my ear, Dr. Gresham whispered:

*"The high priest, Kwo-Sung-tao!"*

With leaping interest, I turned to view the personage—and was held spellbound by the amazing personality of this man who proposed to make himself emperor of all the world.

He was old, *old;* small, shrunken; a very mummy of a man; bald, and with a long white mustache; enveloped in a shroud of cloth of gold, embroidered with crimson dragons and dual gold and silver moons. But never to my dying day can I forget that face, with its fearful eyes! All the wisdom and power and wickedness of the world were blended there!

Straight toward the altar the old man walked, looking neither to the right nor the left; and when he had mounted the steps he paused before the curtains and turned. As his blazing eyes swept the hall the entire multitude seemed to shrink and shrivel. An awful, sepulchral silence fell upon the crowd. The stillness hovered like a living thing. A thrill more intense than I had ever felt came over me; it swept me on cold waves into an ocean of strange, pulsing emotion.

Then, abruptly, a hundred cymbals clashed, subdued drums rolled forth, and the infernal trumpets that had heralded the entrance of the high priest crashed out a demoniacal peal—a veritable anthem of damnation that pierced me to the marrow.

The sound died out. The lights, too, began to sink. For a few moments not a word was spoken; there was the stillness of death, of the end of things. Presently all the illumination was gone save the solitary hooded light in front of the altar.

From his place at the head of the steps the high priest, Kwo-Sung-tao, made a gesture. Silently, and by unseen means, the deep yellow hangings rolled away.

There, to my amazement, the whole end of the temple was open, and we could look off from the mountaintop across innumerable valleys to the great range of peaks that walled the east. Out there the stars were shining, and near the horizon the blue-green heavens were tinged with a swimming silver mist.

The altar itself, if such it might be called, was a single block of undraped stone, about three feet high and four feet long, rising in the center of the platform.

Hardly had I taken in the scene before two of the priests hurried forward, dragging between them a nearly-naked and half-swooning Chinaman. Carrying him up the steps, they flung him on his back upon the altar block and swiftly fastened his hands and feet to manacles on the sides of the stone, so that his naked chest was centered upon the pedestal. The priests then descended from the altar, leaving Kwo-Sung-tao alone beside the prisoner.

Still within the temple the profound silence reigned. There was not a whisper, not a rustle of the silken vestments.

But all at once we noticed that the eastern sky was growing brighter.

Then from before the altar a single somber bass rolled forth in a wailing prayer—a mystical, unearthly sound, coming in shattered sobs:

*"Na-mo O-mi-t'o-fo! Na-mo O-mi-t'o-fo!"*

Suddenly, from over the edge of the world, the moon began to rise!

This was the signal for another hellish blast from the trumpets, followed by the beginning of a steady humming of countless gongs. Other voices joined the quivering bass, together growing louder—seeming to complain and sob and wail like the voices of tortured demons in the abyss.

The rhythmic sounds swelled louder and louder, higher and higher, until the orb of night had climbed clear of the wall of mountains.

Directly against the silver disk I now saw silhouetted the stone altar holding its shrinking prisoner, with the high priest standing close beside him. The priest's right arm was upraised, and in his hand there gleamed a knife.

Still the music grew in volume—tremendous, stunning, a terrific battle of sound.

All at once the high priest's knife flashed downward—straight and deep into the breast of the quivering wretch upon the stone—and in a moment his other hand was raised in salutation to the moon, and in it was clutched the dripping heart of the human sacrifice!

At the sight my limbs grew shaky and my senses swam.

But at this instant, like a blow upon the head, came a lightning-crash of

cymbals, a smiting of great gongs, and a climacteric roar from those agonizing trumpets of hell. Then even the single altar light went out, plunging the great hall in darkness.

Instantly I felt Dr. Gresham's hand upon my arm, and, dazed and helpless, I was dragged out of the temple.

Outside the air released me from my stupor, and I raced beside the scientist to the spot where we had left our outer garments. In the shadow of the wall we slipped these on, and then fled panic-stricken down the mountainside.

## *CHAPTER VIII.*

## THE JAWS OF DEATH

WE DID not pause in our flight from the temple until we reached the foot of the mountain; then, still shaken by the horror of the scene we had witnessed, we sat down to rest until the climbing moon should send its light into the depths of the gorge.

We could discern little of our surroundings, but close at hand we could hear the river rushing between its rocky walls.

Not a word was spoken until finally I inquired: "What next?"

In a low voice that indicated the need of caution even here, Dr. Gresham announced:

"The real work of the night still is before us. I would not have taken the risk of visiting the temple but for the hope that we would learn more of the Seuen-H'sin's layout than we did. Since nothing was gained there, we must reconnoiter the country."

"That sacrifice of human life," I asked—"what was its purpose?"

"To propitiate their god," the astronomer told me. "Every month, on the night of the full moon—in every Seuen-H'sin temple in the world—that hideous slaughter takes place. At certain times the ceremony is elaborated into a thing infinitely more horrible."

At this juncture the moon lifted itself clear of the valley's eastern rim, and the depression was bathed in silvery radiance. This was the signal for our start.

Heading toward the sound of the river, we soon came to the road that led to the *Nippon's* wharf. Beside this highway was an electric transmission line, running on up into the canyon. Turning away from the wharf and the village, we proceeded to follow this line toward its source.

Instead of traversing the road, however, we kept in the shadows of the timber at its side; and it was well that we did so, for we had not gone far before a group of Chinamen appeared around a bend in the highway, walking rapidly toward the town. They wore dark clothes of the same pattern as our own outer garments; and they passed without seeing us.

For fully two miles we followed the power line, until we began to pass numerous groups of Chinamen in close succession—like crowds of men getting off work.

To diminish the chance of our being discovered, Dr. Gresham and I turned up the mountainside. We climbed until we had reached a considerable height above the floor of the gorge, and then, keeping at this elevation, we again pursued the course of the electric line.

Another half hour passed in this scramble along the steep slope, and my companion began to betray uneasiness lest the road and its paralleling copper wires which we could not see from here, had ended or had turned off up some tributary ravine—when suddenly there came to our ears a faint roaring, as of a distant waterfall. At once Dr. Gresham was all alertness, and with quickened steps we pressed forward in the direction of the sound.

Five minutes later, as we rounded a shoulder of the mountain, we were stricken suddenly speechless by the sight, far below us, of a great brilliantly-lighted building!

For a few moments we could only stand and gaze at the thing; but presently, as the timber about us partially obstructed our view, we moved forward to a barren rocky promontory jutting out from the mountainside.

The moon now was well up in the heavens, and from the brow of this headland a vast expanse of country was visible—its every feature standing out, almost as clearly as in the daylight. But, to take advantage of this view, we were obliged to expose ourselves to discovery by any spies the Seuen-H'sin might have posted in the region. The danger was considerable, but our curiosity regarding the lighted building was sufficient to outweight our caution.

The structure was too far distant to reveal much to the naked eye, so we quickly brought our field glasses into use: then we saw that the building was directly upon the bank of the river, and that from its lower wall spouted a number of large, foaming streams of water, as if discharged under terrific pressure. From these torrents, presumably, came the sound of the waterfall. The angle at which we were looking down upon the place prevented our seeing inside the building except at one corner, where, through a window, we could catch a glimpse of machinery running.

But, little as we could see, it was enough to convince me that the place was a hydro-electric plant of enormous proportions, producing energy to the extent of probably hundreds of thousands of horsepower.

Even as I was reaching this conclusion, Dr. Gresham spoke:

"There," he said, "is the source of the Seuen-H'sin's power, which is causing all these upheavals throughout the world! That is where the yellow devils are at work upon their second moon!"

Just as he spoke another of the great ground shocks rocked the earth. Too amazed for comment, I stood staring at the plant until my companion added:

"There is where those brilliant flashes in the heavens came from last night. They were due to some accident in the machinery, causing a short circuit. For two nights I had been circling over this entire range of mountains in the hydroplane, in search of the sorcerers' workshop. The flashes were a fortunate circumstance that led me to the place."

"At last I understand," I remarked presently, "why you were so deeply interested, back there in Washington, in the Steamship *Nippon* and the electric plant she was transporting to Hong-kong. I suppose that is where the sorcerers obtained all this machinery!"

"Precisely!" agreed the astronomer. "That morning in Washington, when I got you to look up the inventory of the *Nippon's* cargo, I had this solution of the mystery in mind. I knew from my years in Wu-yang that electricity was the force the sorcerers would employ, and I was certain I had seen mention in the newspapers of some exceptionally large electrical equipment aboard the *Nippon*. Those supposed pirates of the Yellow Sea were in reality the murderous hordes of the Seuen-H'sin, who had come out to the coast after this outfit."

"But why," I asked, "should these Chinamen, whose development of science is so far in advance of our own, have to get machinery from an inferior people? I should think their own appliances would have made anything from the rest of the world seem antiquated."

"You forget what I told you that first night we spoke of the Seuen-H'sin. Their discoveries never were backed up by manufacturing; they possessed no raw materials or factories or industrial instincts. They did not need to make machinery themselves. In spite of their tremendous isolation, they were watching everything in the outside world. They knew they could get plenty of machinery ready made—once they had perfected their method of operations."

I was still staring at the monster power plant below us when Dr. Gresham announced:

"I know now that my theory of the earthquakes' origin was correct, and if we get safely back to the *Albatross* the defeat of the sorcerers' plans is assured."

"Tell me one thing more," I put in. "Why did the Chinamen come so far from their own country to establish their plant?"

"Because," the doctor replied, "this place was so hidden—yet so easy to reach. And the further they came from their own country to apply their electric impulses to the earth, the less danger their native land would run."

"Still, for my part, the main point of the whole problem remains unsolved," I asserted. "How do the sorcerers use this electricity to shake the world?"

"That," replied the scientist, "requires too long an explanation for the present moment. On the way back to the ship I will tell you the whole thing. But now I must get a closer view of Kwo-Sung-tao's strange workshop."

As Dr. Gresham was speaking, some unexplained feeling of uneasiness—perhaps some faint sound that had registered itself upon my subconscious thoughts without my ears being aware of it—led my gaze to wander over the mountainside in our vicinity. As my eyes rested for a moment upon some rocks about a hundred yards away, I fancied I saw something stir at the side of them.

At this moment Dr. Gresham made a move to leave the promontory. Laying a detaining hand swiftly upon his arm, I whispered:

*"Wait! Stand still!"*

Unquestioningly the astronomer obeyed; and for a couple of minutes I watched the neighboring clump of rocks out of the corner of my eye. Presently I saw a darkly-clad figure crawl out of the shadow of the pile, cross a patch of moonlight, and join two other figures at the edge of the timber. The trio stood looking in our direction a moment, while apparently holding a whispered conference. Then all three disappeared into the shadow of the woods.

Immediately I announced to my companion:

"We have been discovered! There are three Chinamen watching us from the timber, not a hundred yards away!"

The scientist was silent a moment. Then:

"Do they know you saw them?" he asked.

"I think not," I replied.

Still without looking around, he asked:

"Where are they—directly behind us?"

"No; well to the side—the side nearest the power plant."

"Good! Then we'll move back toward the timber at once—go leisurely, as if we suspected nothing. If we reach the cover of the woods all right, we'll make a dash for it. Head straight up for the top of the ridge—cross over and descend into the gulch on the other side—then detour back toward the *Albatross*. Stick to the shadows—travel as fast as we can—and try to throw off pursuit!"

Moving off as unconsciously as if we were totally unaware that we had been observed, we struck out for the timber—all the time keeping a sharp lookout, for we half expected the spies to head us off and attempt a surprise attack. But we reached the darkness of the woods without even a glimpse of the Celestials; and instantly we broke into a run.

The ascent was too steep to permit much speed; moreover, the roughness of the ground and the down-timber hampered us greatly—yet we had the consolation of knowing that it equally hampered our pursuers.

For nearly an hour we pressed on. The mountaintop was crossed, and we decended into a canyon on the other side. No sight or sound of the Chinamen had greeted us. Could they have surmised the course we would take, and calmly let us proceed, while they returned for reinforcements to head us off? Or were they silently stalking us to find out who we were and whence we came? We could not tell. And there was the other chance, too, that we had shaken off pursuit.

Gradually this latter possibility became a definite hope, which grew as our overtaxed strength began to fail. Nevertheless, we pushed on until we were so spent and winded that we could scarcely drag one foot after the other.

We had now reached a spot where the floor of the canyon widened out into a tiny level park. Here the timber was so dense that we were swallowed up in almost complete darkness; and in this protecting mantle of shadow we decided to stop for a brief rest. Stretching out upon the ground, with our arms extended at our sides, we lay silent, inhaling deep breaths of the cool, refreshing mountain air.

We were now on the opposite side of a long and high mountain ridge from the Chinese village, and, as nearly as we could estimate, not more than a mile or two from the *Albatross*.

Lying there on the ground, we could feel the earthquakes with startling violence. We noticed that they no longer occurred only at intervals of eleven minutes and a fraction—although they were particularly severe at those periods—but that they kept up an almost continuous quivering, as if the globe's internal forces were bubbling restlessly.

Suddenly, in the wake of one of the heavier shocks of the eleven-minute period, the intense stillness was broken by a sharp report, followed by a ripping sound from the bowels of the earth, that seemed to start close at hand and rush off into the distance, quickly dying out. From the mountainside above us came the crash of a falling tree and the clatter of a few dislodged rocks bounding down the slope. The earth swayed as if a giant gash had opened and closed within a few rods of us.

The occurrence made Dr. Gresham and myself sit up instantly. Nothing, however, was visible through the forest gloom of any changes in the landscape. Again silence settled about us.

Several minutes passed.

Then abruptly, from a short distance away, came the sound of something stirring. Sitting motionless, alert, we listened. Almost immediately we heard it again, and this time the sound did not die out. Something off there in the timber was moving stealthily toward us!

Dropping back at full length upon the ground, with only our heads raised, we kept a sharp watch.

Only a few more moments were we kept in suspense; then, across a slit of moonlight, we saw five Chinamen swiftly moving. They were slinking along almost noiselessly, as if following a scent—and, with a shock, we realized that it was ourselves they were tracking! We had not shaken off our pursuers, after all!

Even before we could decide, in a whispered debate, what our next move should be, our nerves again were whipped taut by other sounds close at hand—but now on the opposite side of the little valley from the first ones. This time the sounds grew fainter—only to become louder again almost immediately, as if the intruders were searching back and forth across the flat. In a short while it became plain that they were drawing closer to us.

"What fools we were to stop to rest!" the astronomer complained.

"I have a hunch we would have run into some of those spies if we had kept on," I rejoined. "They must have headed us off and found that we didn't pass on down this canyon, else they

wouldn't be searching here so thoroughly."

"Right!" my friend agreed. "And now they've got us in a tight place!"

"Suppose," I suggested, "we slip across the valley and climb part way up that other mountainside—then try to work along through the timber up there until we're near the ship?"

"Good!" he assented. "Come on!"

Lying at full length upon the ground and wriggling along like snakes, we headed between two groups of the searchers. It was slow work, but we did not dare even to rise to our knees to crawl. Twice we dimly made out, not fifty feet away, some of the Chinamen slinking along, apparently hunting over every foot of the region. We could not tell how many of them there were now.

After a time that seemed nearly endless we reached the edge of the flat. Here we rose to our feet to tackle the slope in front of us.

As we did so, two figures leaped out of the gloom close at hand and split the night with cries of *"Fan kuei! Fan kuei!"* ("Foreign devils!")

Then they sprang to seize us.

Further concealment being impossible, we darted back into the valley, no longer avoiding the patches of moonlight, but rather seeking them, so we could see where we were going. We were heading for the fiord.

In a few seconds other cries arose on all sides of us. It seemed we were surrounded and that the whole region swarmed with Chinamen. Dark forms began to plunge out of the woods ahead to intercept us; the leading ones were not sixty feet away.

"We'll have to fight for it!" called Dr. Gresham. And our hands flew to our revolvers.

But before we could draw the weapons a great ripping and crashing sound burst forth upon the mountainside above us—the terrifying noise of rocks splitting and grinding—an appalling turmoil! Terrified, pursued and pursuers alike paused to glance upward.

There, in the brilliant moonlight, we saw a monster avalanche sweeping downward, engulfing everything in its way!

Abandoning the astronomer and myself, the Chinamen turned to flee further from the path of the landslide—and we all began running together down the valley.

Only a few steps had we gone, however, when above the roaring of the avalanche a new sound rang out—short, sharp, booming, like the report of a giant gun.

As I glanced about through the blotches of moonlight and shadow, I saw several of the sorcerers just ahead suddenly halt, stagger and then drop from sight.

Dr. Gresham and I stopped instantly, but not before we beheld other Chinamen disappearing from view.

*The earth had opened and they were falling in!*

Even as we stood there, hesitating, the black maw yawned wider—to our very feet—and with cries of horror we tried to stagger back. But we were too late. The sides of the crack were crumbling in, and in another instant the widening gash overtook us.

As his eyes met mine, I saw the astronomer topple backward and disappear.

A second later the ground gave way beneath my own feet and I was plunged into the blackness of the pit.

*This extraordinary novel will be concluded in the June issue of WEIRD TALES.*

*Tell your newsdealer to reserve a copy for you*

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# THE SECRET FEAR

## *A "Creepy" Detective Story*

## *By* KENNETH DUANE WHIPPLE

THE NIGHT was hot and breathless, as had been the day, and the humid *tang* of the salt air smote my nostrils as, envying Martin his vacation respite from the grind of police reporting, I turned off the broad, paved thoroughfare of Washington Avenue and started down Wharf Street, narrow and dimly lighted, toward my lodgings beyond the bridge.

As I passed the second dirty-globed street light I halted suddenly, with the staccato sound of hurrying footsteps in my ears. Homeward bound from the Journal office, where Martin's work had kept me until after midnight, I had yielded to the temptation offered by the short cut. Now, with the peculiar emphatic insistence of the footfalls behind me, I began to wonder if I had chosen wisely.

Brass buttons, glinting dully under the corner arc, reassured me. The next instant I was roughly ordered to halt. I recognized the hoarse, panting voice of Patrolman Tom Kenton of the fourth precinct, whose beat, as I knew, lay along the wharves.

"It's me, Kenton—Jack Bowers, of the *Journal*," I said. "What's doing?"

Kenton peered at me keenly in the bad light. Then his face relaxed.

"Man killed in Kellogg's warehouse, just around the corner there," he replied.

"Killed? How?"

"The sergeant didn't say. I got it from him just now when I reported. Someone 'phoned in a minute ago. Come along and see, if you want. It's right in your line, and you're a good friend of the captain's."

I fell into step with him, finding some difficulty in keeping pace.

"Do you know who 'phoned?" I asked.

"No. May be a joke. May be a frame-up. May be anything."

His deep voice rumbled through the gloom of the dingy street, deserted save for our hurrying figures. We crossed to the opposite side, passing beneath a blue arc which flamed and sputtered naked through a jagged gash in its dirty, frosted globe.

Just around the corner loomed the ramshackle bulk of Kellogg's warehouse, a four-story, wooden structure squatting above the river piers. On the ground floor a broad entrance gaped blackly. At the left of the doorway, about three feet above street level, the end of a loading platform jutted out of the darkness.

Beyond the warehouse a narrow pier ran out toward midstream. I caught a glimpse of the riding lights of some small vessel, dimly outlined against the gray-black of the oily water.

Kenton stopped at the corner of the

*(Continued on page 44)*

*Whether or Not You Believe in Reincarnation, You Will Be Thrilled By Reading*

# JUNGLE BEASTS

## *A Complete Novelette*

### *By* WILLIAM P. BARRON

"LOOK!" said the nurse to the young interne on the second floor of Dr. Winslow's sanatorium. "See what I found in the table drawers of 112—the patient who was discharged last evening. Do you suppose this horrible story can be true?"

The interne took the manuscript with a blase air. He had read so many of these ravings on paper!

"This one is really unusual," said the nurse, noticing his manner. "Please read it."

Mildly interested, the interne began to read:

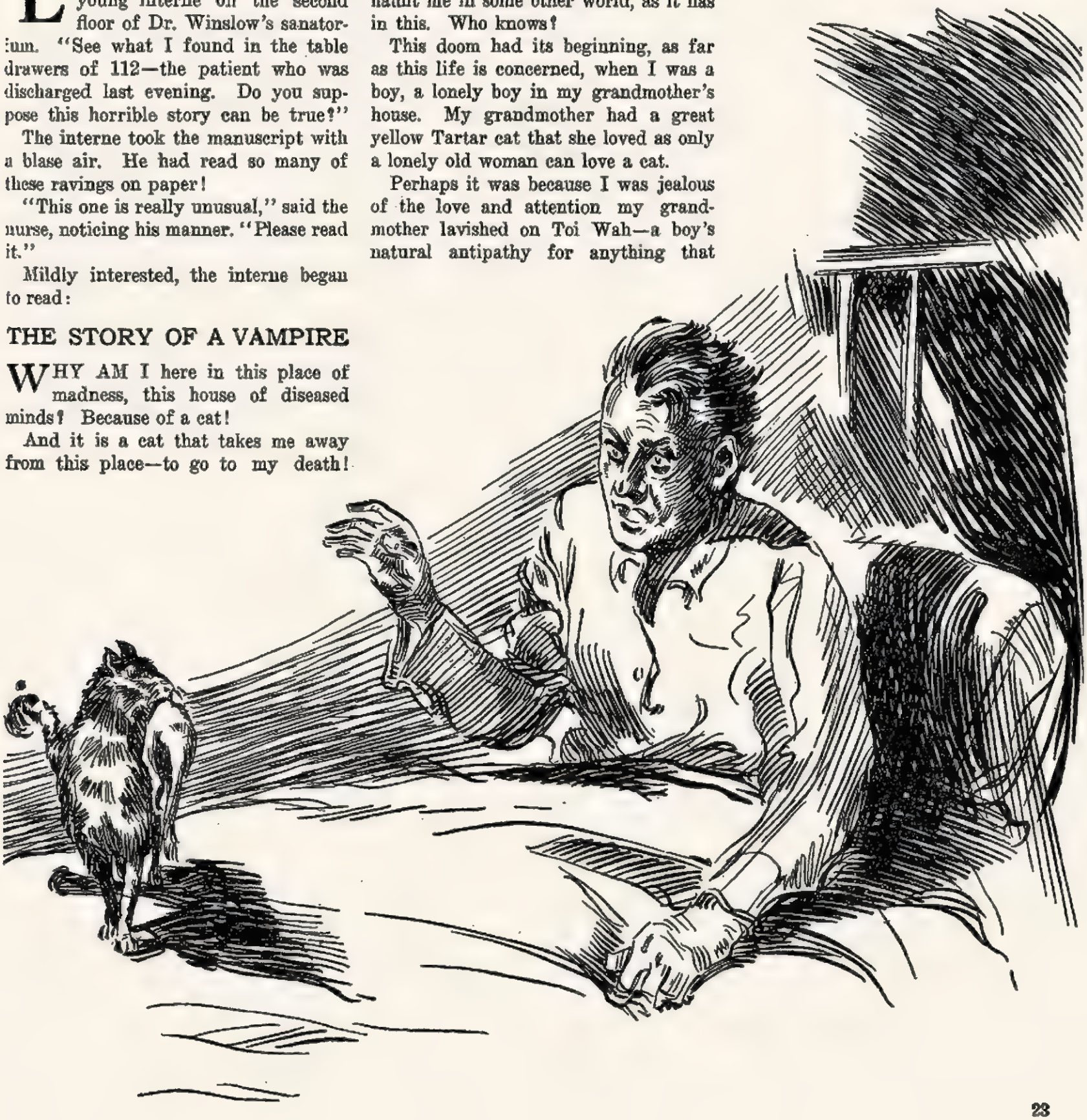
### THE STORY OF A VAMPIRE

WHY AM I here in this place of madness, this house of diseased minds? Because of a cat!

And it is a cat that takes me away from this place—to go to my death! And maybe this cat will follow on to haunt me in some other world, as it has in this. Who knows?

This doom had its beginning, as far as this life is concerned, when I was a boy, a lonely boy in my grandmother's house. My grandmother had a great yellow Tartar cat that she loved as only a lonely old woman can love a cat.

Perhaps it was because I was jealous of the love and attention my grandmother lavished on Toi Wah—a boy's natural antipathy for anything that



usurps the place he thinks is his by right. Or perhaps it was the same inborn cruelty, the same impish impulse to inflict suffering on a helpless dumb creature, which I have observed in other boys.

Anyway, with or without reason, I hated this self-complacent, supercilious animal that looked at me out of topaz eyes, with a look that seemed to see through and beyond me, as if I did not exist.

I hated her with a hatred that could be satisfied only with her death, and I thought and brooded for hours, that should have been devoted to my studies, of ways and means to bring this death about.

I must be fair to myself. Toi Wah hated me too. I could sense it as I sat by my grandmother's chair before the fire and looked across at Toi Wah, who lay in a chair on the opposite side. At such times I would always catch her watching me out of half-closed eyes, stealthily, furtively, never off her guard.

If she lay in my grandmother's lap and I leaned over to stroke her beautiful yellow fur, I could feel her actually shrink from my hand, and she would never purr, as she always did when my grandmother stroked her.

Sometimes I would hold her on my lap and pretend that I loved her. But as I stroked her, my hands would itch and twitch with the desire to clinch my hand in her satiny skin, and with the other hand choke her until she died.

My desire to kill would become so over-powering that my breath would become hurried, my heart would beat almost to suffocation and my face would flush.

Usually my grandmother, noticing my reddened face would glance up over her spectacles, from the book she was reading and say, "What ail you, Robert? You look flushed and feverish. Perhaps the room is too warm for you. Put Toi Wah down and run out in the air for a while."

I would take Toi Wah then, and, holding her as tightly as I dared, and with my teeth clenched to restrain myself, I would put her on her cushion and go out.

My grandfather had brought Toi Wah, a little yellow, fluffy, amber-eyed kitten, home with him in his ship from that mysterious land washed by the Yellow Sea.

And with Toi Wah had come a strange tale of her taking, stolen from an old Buddhist Monastery garden nestling among age-old pines beside the Grand Canal of China.

About her neck was a beautifully-wrought collar of flexible gold, with a dragon engraved along its length, together with many Chinese characters and set with stones of Topaz and Jade. The collar was made so as to allow for expansion as the need arose, so that Toi Wah was never without her collar from her kittenhood to adult age. In fact, the collar could not be loosened without injury to the metal.

One day I descended into the kitchen with the cat in my arms and showed Charlie, our Chinese cook, who had sailed the Seven Seas with my grandfather, the collar about her neck.

The old Chinaman stared until his eyes started from his head, all the time making queer little noises in his throat. He rubbed his eyes and put on his great horn spectacles and stared again, muttering to himself.

"What is it, Charlie?" I asked, surprised at the old man, who was usually so stoically calm.

"These velly gleat words," he said at last, shaking his head cryptically. "Words no good flo you. Words good for velly gleat cat; Gland Lama cat."

But what do the words say?" I urged.

He mooned over the inscription for a long time, fingering the collar lovingly, while Toi Wah lay passively in my arms and looked at him.

"He say what I no can say good in English," he explained at last. "He say, 'Death no can do, no can die.' See? When Gland Lama cat wear this colla', no can die. No can be kill him—just change flom cat to some other thing; monkey—tiger—hoss—maybe man—next time," he concluded vaguely.

"He say, 'Love me, I love you, hate me, I hate you.' No can say good in English what Chinese say. See?"

And with this I had to be content for the time. Now I know the characters engraved on Toi Wah's collar referred to a quotation from the seventh book of Buddha, which, freely translated, reads as follows:

*"That which is alive hath known death, and that which lives can never die. Death is not; there is only a changing from shape to shape, from life to life.*

*"Mayhap the despised animal, walking in the dust of the road, was one time King of Ind, or the consort of Ghengis Khan.*

*"Do me no harm. Protect me, O Man, and I will protect thee. Feed me, O Man, and I will feed thee. Love me, O Man, and I will love thee. Hate me, and I will hate thee. Slay me, and I will slay thee.*

*"We be brothers, O Man, thou and I, from life to life, from death to death, until Nirvana be won."*

If I had only known then, and stayed my hand, I would not now be haunted by this yellow terror that peers out at me from the dark; that follows after me with softly padding feet; never nearer, never receding, until. . . .

Toi Wah was mated with another Tartar cat of high degree, and became the mother of a kitten.

And such a mother! Only the hard heart made cruel by fear would remain unsoftened by the great cat's untiring devotion to her kitten.

Everywhere she went she carried it in her mouth; never leaving it alone for a moment, seeming to sense its danger from me; an abnormal, hated cat!

However, she seemed to relent even toward me if I happened to pass her chair when she was nursing the little creature.

At such times she would lay stretching out her legs, opening and shutting her great paws in a sort of ecstasy, purring her utter content. She would look up at me, maternal pride and joy glowing in her yellow eyes, soft and lustrous now, the hate and suspicion of me crowded out by mother love.

"Look!" she seemed to say. "Look at this wonderful thing I have created out of my body! Do you not love it?"

I did not love it. No! On the contrary, it intensified my hate by adding another object to it.

My grandmother added fuel to the fire by sending me out to the shops to buy delicacies for Toi Wah and her kitten; liverwurst and catnip for the mother, milk and cream for the kitten.

"Robert, my son," she would say to me, all unaware of my hatred, "Do you know we have quite a royal family with us? These wonderful cats are descended in an unbroken line from the cats of the Royal Household of Ghengis Khan. The records were kept in the Buddhist Monastery from which Toi Wah came."

"How did Grandfather get her?" I asked.

"Do not ask me, child," the old lady smiled. "He told me only that he stole her in a spirit of bravado from the garden of this ancient Buddhist Monastery when egged on to do so by his friends. They were spending an idle week exploring the ancient towns along the Grand Canal of China, and were attracted by the beautiful Tartar cats in this garden. It seemed the Buddhist Monks reared these cats as a sort of religious duty.

"Your grandfather always believed that a Buddish curse of some sort went with Toi Wah after a Chinese merchant translated the Chinese characters on her collar for him. And he often said he wished that he had not whisked her into the pocket of his big sou'wester jacket, when the priests were not looking.

"Myself, I do not believe in these superstitious curses and omens, so I would not let him take the collar off. In fact, he *could* not do it; it was so cunningly riveted.

"He always feared some evil would come from the cat, but I have found her a great comfort and a thing to love."

And she would hold out her hands to Toi Wah, and the great cat would leap in her lap and rub her head lovingly against my grandmother's neck.

After that I feared Toi Wah more than ever. This fear was an intangible, elusive thing. I could not understand it or analyze it; but it was very real. If I wandered about the dim old passageways of my grandmother's ancient house, or explored the dusty cobwebby rooms, there seemed always to follow after me the soft padding sound of Toi Wah's paws. Following, always following after me, but never coming nearer; always just beyond where I could see.

It was maddening! Always to have following after me the stealthy, soft, almost inaudible sound of padded feet. I could never win free from it within the house.

In my bedroom, sitting alone before the fire with the door locked and bolted, every corner of the room previously explored, the bed looked under, I would always feel that she was sitting there behind me, watching me out of vigilant yellow eyes. Eyes that were full of suspicion and hate. Waiting, watching—for what? I did not know. I only feared.

Out of this fear grew many unreal terrors. I came to believe that Toi Wah was waiting a favorable chance to spring on me from behind, or when I was asleep, and to dig her great curved claws into my throat, tearing and rending it in her hate.

I became so possessed by this fear that I fashioned a leather collar for myself that fitted well up under my ears and around my neck. I wore this always when I was alone in my room and when I slept, gaining some sense of security thereby. But in the night time! No one can know what I, a lonely boy, suffered then!

My eyes would no sooner close in drowsy weariness when the stealthy padding of Toi Wah's footsteps would begin. I could hear them coming softly up the stairs, stealing along the dark passageway to my room, at the end. They stopped there because the door was locked and bolted, with the heavy chiffonier jammed against it as an extra precaution. I would listen intently, and I fancied I could hear a faint scratching sound at the door.

Then there would rush over me all the terrors of the dark. Suppose I had failed to close the transom securely? If the transom was open Toi Wah could, with one great leap, win through and on to my bed. And then—

The cold sweat of fear would exude from every pore, as my imagination visualized Toi Wah leaping through, and, with a snarl, pouncing upon my throat with tooth and claw. I would shudder and tremblingly feel about my neck to make sure my leather collar was securely fastened.

At last, unable to stand the uncertainty any longer, I would leap out of bed, turn on the light, rush to the door, frantically drag the heavy chiffonier to one side, and throw open the door. Nothing!

Then I would creep along the passageway to the head of the stairs, and peer down into the dimly-lighted hall. Nothing!

Looking fearfully over my shoulder as I went, I would go back to my room, shut the door, lock and bolt it, push the chiffonier against it, assure myself that the transom was closed, and jump into bed, burying my head beneath the covers.

Then I could sleep. Sleep only to dream that Toi Wah had crept softly into the room and was sucking the breath out of my body. This was a popular superstition in the country years ago, and no doubt my dream was aided by my being half suffocated beneath the bedclothes. But the dream was none the less terrifying and real.

Night after night I lived this life of cowering terror; of listening for the haunting sound of stealthy, softly-padding footsteps always following, never advancing, never receding.

But the day of my revenge came at last. How sweet it was then! How frightful it seems now!

## *II*

TOI WAH'S kitten, now half grown, wandered away from his mother below stairs and up to my room. Returning home from school, I found him there, lying on the rug playing with one of my tennis balls.

Joy filled my heart at the sight of him. I had just seen his mother sleeping placidly on my grandmother's lap, who was also sleeping.

I softly closed and locked the door. At last I would be rid of one of the pests that made my life a hell! I put on my leather collar and the heavy gloves I used for working in the garden. I took these precautions because even of this small kitten I was afraid!

Unaware of its danger, the kitten romped about the rug. I drew a long breath, stooped and picked him up. He looked at me, sensed his danger, spat, and tried to squirm out of my hands.

"Too late, you devil!" I exulted, holding him firmly.

A buzzing came to my ears, a fullness of the head, a dryness of the mouth, as I choked him—choked him until his glazing yellow eyes started from their sockets and his tongue hung out. Choked him joyously, relentlessly, deriving more pleasure from the death agony of this little creature, whose mother I hated and feared, than I had ever known.

After a long time I opened my hands and looked at him closely for any signs of life. But he was quite dead. Of one of them at least, I was forever rid, I thought jubilantly as I gazed at the lifeless body. And then—

There came a scratching at the door; and a loving, agonized *meow!*

It did not seem possible that any animal was capable of putting into the only sound with which it could express itself, the anxious, yearning love that sound conveyed.

The old fear clutched at my heart. It seems incredible that I, almost a full-grown man, a football champion and all-round athlete, could be afraid of a cat in broad daylight.

But I was! Cold sweat poured down my back, and my hands trembled so that the dead kitten fell with a soft *thump* on the rug.

This sound aroused me from my semi-stupor of fear. Hastily, I threw up the window-sash and tossed the inert little body out into the yard.

I closed the window, and, with a studied nonchalance, walked whistling to the door and opened it.

"Come in, kittie," I said innocently. "Poor kittie!"

Toi Wah ran in and frantically circled the room, *meowing* piteously. She paid no attention to me, but ran here and there, under the bed, under the chiffonier, seeking in every corner of the large old-fashioned room.

She came at last to the rug before the fire, lowered her head and sniffed at the spot where, but a moment before, her darling had lain.

She looked up at me, then, with great mournful eyes. Eyes with no hate in them now, only unutterable sorrow. I

have never seen in the eyes of any creature the sorrow I saw there.

That look brough a queer lump in my throat. I was sorry now for what I had done. If I could have recalled my act, I would have done so. But it was too late. The dead kitten lay out in the yard.

For a moment Toi Wah looked at me, and then the sorrow in her eyes gave way to the old look of suspicion and hate. And then, with a yowl like a wolf, she sprang out of the room.

As night came on, my fear increased. I dared not go to bed. I was uneasy, too, craven that I was, for fear my grandmother would suspect me. But, fortunately for me, she though the kitten had been stolen and never dreamed I had killed it.

I lingered until the last moment before starting upstairs to bed. I studiously avoided looking at Toi Wah as I passed her on my way to the stairs.

I raced up the stairs and down the long passage to my bedroom. Hastily undressing, throwing my clothes here and there, I plunged into the very center of the bed and buried my head beneath the covers.

There I waited in shivering terror for the sound of padding footsteps. They never came. And then, because I was tired out by the lateness of the hour, and perhaps also stupefied by the lack of fresh air in my room, I slept.

Far in the night I heard the chimes from the church across the street, and opened my eyes. The moonlight was shining in from the window and I saw two fiery eyes glaring at me from a corner.

Was I in the clutches of a nightmare, engendered by my fears? Or had I, in my haste to get to bed, neglected to shut and lock my door? I do not know, but suddenly there was a jar to the bed as something leaped upon it from the floor.

I sat up, shivering with terror, and Toi Wah looked into my eyes and held them. In her mouth she held the bedraggled body of her kitten. She laid it softly down on the coverlet, never taking her eyes from mine.

Suddenly a soft glow, a sort of halo, shone around her, and then, as I am a living and an honorable man, *Toi Wah spoke to me!*

### *III.*

SHE SAID—I could see her mouth move—*"He that hath slain shall slay again. Then he that slayeth shall himself be slain.*

*"Yea, seventy times seven shall thy days be after my cycle is broken. Then, at this hour, shall I return that the thing may be accomplished after Lord Buddha's law."*

Then the voice ceased, the halo faded. I felt the bed rebound as she jumped to the floor, and there I heard the soft padding of her feet down the passageway.

I awoke with a shriek. My forehead was damp with sweat. My teeth were chattering. I looked and saw that my door was wide open. I leaped out of bed and turned on the light. Was it a hideous dream, a fearful nightmare?

I do not know. But, lying there on the coverlet, was the wet muddy body of Toi Wah's kitten.

A live and famished man-eating tiger in the room could not have inspired me with greater terror. I dared not touch the cold dead thing. I dared not remain in the room with it.

I fled down the stairs, stumbling over furniture in the lower hall, until I reached the houseman's room. Here I knocked and begged, with chattering teeth, to be allowed to remain on a couch in his room until morning, telling him I had been frightened by a dreadful dream.

Early the next morning I secretly took the dead kitten out in the garden and buried it deep, putting a pile of stones over the grave; watching carefully for any glimpse of Toi Wah.

As I returned to the house, I met the old housekeeper, who stood with an anxious face at the kitchen door.

"Master Robert, no wonder that you could not sleep the morn! Your poor grandmother passed away in the night. It must have been after midnight, for I did not leave her until the stroke of eleven."

My heart leaped. Not for surprise or grief at my grandmother's death. That was a thing to be expected, and the cold aristocratic old lady had not loved me over much.

Nor was it for joy that she had left me rich, the last of an old race whose forbears went down to the sea in ships, bringing home the wealth of the world.

No! I thought only that Toi Wah and I were on equal ground at last! And that as soon as possible I would rid myself of the dread of her by day and my terror of her by night.

My inheritance would be a thing of little worth if I must spend anxious days and fear-haunted nights. Toi Wah must die, in order that I might know joyful days and sleep at night in peace.

The joyous blood throbbed in my head and hissed in my ears as I raced up to my room, got my leather collar and gloves and seized the great iron poker beside the fire-place.

I carried these up to the attic, a small, close room, dimly lighted by a skylight. There were no openings here from which a cat could escape.

Then I descended to my grandmother's room. Already the corpse candles had been lighted. I gave only a glance at the quiet, gaunt, aristocratic old face, dignified even in death.

I looked about in the flickering shadows thrown by the candles for Toi Wah. I did not see her. Could it be that she, sensing her danger, had fled?

My heart sank. I drew my breath sharply.

"The cat—Toi Wah?" I asked the housekeeper, who watched beside the dead. "Where is she?"

"Under the bed," she answered. "The poor creature is that distracted she would not eat, and had to be driven from your grandmother's side in order that we might compose the body. She would not leave the room, but darted under the bed there, snarling and spitting. It's afraid of her I am."

I got down on my hands and knees and peered under the bed. Crouched in the farthest corner was Toi Wah, and her great yellow eyes glared at me in terror and defiance.

"It's afraid of her, I am, Master Robert," the housekeeper repeated. "Please take her away."

I was afraid of Toi Wah, too. So afraid of her that I could know no peace, nor happiness, if she lived. I was sure of that.

It is the coward who is dangerous. Fear kills always if it can. It never temporizes, nor is it ever merciful. Beware of him who fears you.

I crawled under the bed and seized her. She made no resistance, much to my surprise, but I could feel her body trembling through my gloves. As my hand closed over her, she made a little sound like a gasp—that was all.

I crawled out, and in the presence of the housekeeper, and the dead, I held her lovingly in my arms, calling her "poor kittie" and stroking her long yellow fur, while she lay passive, tremblingly passive, in my arms.

I deceived the housekeeper, who thought I was venting my grief for my grandmother's death by loving and caressing the object of the old lady's affection. I did not deceive Toi Wah. She lay quietly in my arms, but it was the paralysis of terror; the nonresistant stupor of great fear. Her body never ceased trembling, and her eyes were lifeless and dull. She seemed to know her fate and had accepted the inevitable.

I carried her upstairs, threw her upon the floor and locked the door. I seized the poker beside the door and turned to slay her. Toi Wah lay where I had thrown her, crouched as if to spring, but she did not move. She only looked at me.

I did not fear her now. On my hands were heavy gauntlets, and about my throat was the heavy leather guard I had made, bradded and studded with steel and brass.

Toi Wah did not move. She only looked, but such a look! It appealed to the merciless devil in my heart. It burned into my soul.

"Kill me!" her great amber eyes seemed to say. "Kill me quickly and mercifully as you killed the darling of my heart. What sayeth the Master: 'Be merciful, and thy heart shall know peace.' Today is yours, tomorrow—Who can say?"

As if in a dream, I stood and looked into her eyes. Looked until those amber eyes converged into a dirty yellow pool around the edge of which grew giant ferns and reeds taller than our forest trees. And a misty haze hung over the scene.

Into the pool floated a canoe, a hollowed-out tree trunk. In the canoe was a man, a woman, and a child, all naked except for skins about their shoulders.

The man pushed toward the shore with a pole, and as he made a landing he leaped into the water and pulled the boat upon the bank.

As he pulled at the boat, the reeds quivered to the right of him, and a great yellow-colored tiger leaped from the cover of the ferns and seized the child.

For a moment it stood there, the man and woman paralyzed by fear and horror. Then, blood dripping from its jaws, it leaped back among the reeds and was gone.

The face of the man in the boat *was mine!* And it was Toi Wah who held my child in her dripping jaws! A great Toi Wah, with sabre teeth and dirty yellow hide, but still Toi Wah.

The pool faded and I stood there, looking into the eyes of my grandmother's Tartar cat.

But I knew! *At last I knew!*

## *IV.*

EXPLAIN it how you will, I knew that somewhere far back in that prehistoric time, Toi Wah had snatched away my first-born before my tortured eyes and that his tender flesh had filled a sabre-toothed tiger's maw.

Now had come the day of my revenge! I clutched the poker more firmly in my hands. I stood and seized her by the collar that none of us had been able to unfasten. It came off in my hand!

Wonderingly, I looked at it, then cast it aside, to think no more of the curious antique until. . . .

I was in haste to rid myself of this thing of hate and dread. My heart leaped. I ground my teeth in an ecstasy of joy; my cheeks burned. A feeling of well-being and power made my whole body glow. . . .

I left her there, at last, on the blood-stained floor, a broken dead thing, and went out and locked the door after me.

I was free at last! Free from the fear of claws and teeth in my quivering throat. Free from the sound of softly-padding feet. I was a new man, indeed, for there sloughed from me all the old timidity and lack of aggressiveness that this fear of Toi Wah had engendered in me. I went from my grandmother's house to college, a man among men. . . .

I did not return again to the house of my inheritance until I brought my bride—a shy, soft, fluffy little thing a lovely contrast to the aggressive type of modern woman.

She was an old-world Eastern type, the daughter of a returned Chinese missionary, educated in the Orient, and she had the manners and had absorbed the ideals of the soft-voiced, secluded, home-loving Chinese women among whom she had been reared.

Her light brown eyes and yellow hair, her slow, undulating graceful walk, and her quaint old-fashioned ways attracted me; and after a short, impetuous wooing we were wed.

I was very happy. Only twenty-four, wealthy, and married to a loving and beautiful girl whom I adored!

I looked forward to a long life of peace and happiness, but it was not to be. From the very day of my return to the accursed house of my grandmother there was a change. What was it? I do not know, but I could feel it. I could sense it, the very first day. A subtle something, a pall of gloom, intangible, elusive and baffling, began slowly to settle over me, stifling and suffocating the happiness that was mine before the evil day of my return home.

I had returned from the village with some trifle of household necessity. The servants had not yet arrived, and the housekeeper, old and infirm now, was busy putting the place in order.

Returning, I sought my wife, and found her in my grandmother's room, standing before the life-size portrait of Toi Wah, done in oil for my grandmother by a great artist, who also loved cats as she had loved them.

Until that day Toi Wah had remained only a dim memory of a fear-driven boy's cruel revenge. Purposely, I had put all thought of her out of my mind. But now it all returned, a horde of hateful memories, as I stood there in the open door and saw my wife standing and gazing up at the likeness of the great cat.

And as she turned, startled at my entrance, what did I see?

I saw, or thought I saw, a likeness, a great likeness, between the two! Eyes, hair, the general expression—Why had I not noticed it before!

And what else? In my wife's eyes was the old fear, the ancient hate, I used to see in Toi Wah's eyes when I came suddenly into my grandmother's room—this room! The look flashed out for an instant and was gone.

"How you frightened me, Robert!" she laughed. "And the look in your face! What has happened?"

"Nothing," I answered. "Nothing at all."

"But why did you look at me so?" she insisted. "Surely something has gone amiss. Aren't the servants coming? If they are not, I am not entirely useless; I can even cook," and she laughed again, an embarrassed laugh I thought.

She had the manner of having been surprised by my entrance, of being detected in something, secret or hidden, which she was now trying to cover up and conceal.

"Why," I stammered confusedly, for this remarkable resemblance had thrown me quite off my feet, "nothing is wrong. Only I was suddenly struck, as you stood there by the portrait of my grandmother's cat, by the remarkable resemblance; your hair, your eyes—the same color. That was all."

"Why, Robert!" she laughed, holding up an admonishing finger.

This time I was sure of the note of confusion in her laugh, which seemed forced. My wife was not given to laughter, being a quiet, self-contained sort of person.

"Imagine! I, like a cat!"

"Well," I said lightly, gathering her in my arms—for I, too, was dissembling, now that I had regained my self-possession and saw that I was betraying my secret fear—"Toi Wah was a very beautiful and high-bred cat. Her ancestry dated back to Ghengis Khan. So to resemble her would not be so bad, would it?" And I kissed her.

Did she shrink from the caress? Did her body tremble in my arms? Or was it imagination, the stirring of old memories of Toi Wah, who shrank from my lightest touch?

I did not know. I do know, however, that my strange experience on that day was the beginning of the end; the end that is not yet, but is swiftly on the way—for me!

## V.

AS THE day wore on, I grew restless and uneasy; ill at ease and dissatisfied.

So after dinner I went for a long walk along the country roads. When I returned my wife was asleep. I lay down softly beside her, and, tired out by my long walk, was soon asleep myself.

Asleep, I dreamed. Dreamed of Toi Wah and Toi Wah's kitten. And I heard again, in my sleep, the plaintive cry of the cat mother as she called anxiously and lovingly for her kitten that would never return.

So vivid and so real was the dream that I awoke with a cry of the cat in my ears. And as I awoke, I seemed to hear it again— plaintive, subdued, a half-cat, half-human cry, as if a woman had cried aloud and then quickly suppressed the cry.

And my wife was gone!

I sprang up hastily. The moonlight was streaming through the window. It was almost as light as day. She was nowhere in the room.

I went swiftly down the hall and descended the stairs, making no noise with my bare feet. The door of my grandmother's room was open. I looked in. Two luminous eyes, with a greenish tinge, glowed out at me from the semi-darkness of the far corner.

For an instant my heart stood still, and then raced palpitatingly on. I took a deep breath and went toward the unknown thing with glowing eyes that crouched in that corner.

As I reached the pool of moonlight in the center of the room, I heard a gasp of fear, a sudden movement, and my wife fled past me, out of the room and up the stairs.

I heard the bedroom door slam behind her, heard the key turn in the lock.

As she rushed past me and up the stairs, the patter of her feet fell on my ears like the soft padding of Toi Wah's footsteps that had filled my youthful years with fear. My blood chilled at this old, until now, forgotten sound.

What craven fear was this? I tried to pull myself together, to reason rationally. Fear of a cat long dead, whose mouldering bones were upstairs on the attic floor! What was there to fear? Was I going mad?

The slamming of the bedroom door, the turning of the key in the lock, instantly changed my thought and roused in me an overwhelming fury. Was I to be locked out of my own bedroom—*our* bedroom?

I rushed up the stairs. I knocked on the door, I rattled the knob. I pounded with my fists on the panels. I shouted, "Open! *Open the door!*"

In the midst of my furious onslaught, the door suddenly opened and a sleepy-eyed little figure stood aside to allow me to enter.

"Why, Robert!" she exclaimed, as I stood there, bewildered and ashamed, a furious conflict of doubt, fear and uncertainty raging in my mind. "What's the matter? Where have you been? I was sound asleep, and you frightened me, shouting and pounding at the door."

Was I deceived? Partly. But in her eyes! Ah! In her eyes was that sly, inscrutable catlike look that I had never seen there until that day. And now that look never leaves them, it is there always!

"What were you doing below stairs—alone—in my grandmother's room?" I stammered.

She arched her brows incredulously.

"I?—below stairs? Why, Robert, what is wrong with you? I just this moment awoke from a sound sleep to let you in. How could I be below stairs?"

"But the bedroom door was locked!" I exclaimed.

"You must have gone below yourself," she explained, "and shut the door after you. It has a spring lock. You surely must have had some hideous dream. Dear, come to bed now." And she went back to bed.

Again I dissembled as I had that day when I found her standing before Toi Wah's portrait. I knew, beyond a reasonable doubt, that she was lying. I knew I had been fully awake and in my right senses when I had gone down stairs and found her there. Evidently she desired to deceive me, and until I could fathom her motive I would pretend to believe her. So, muttering something to the effect that she must be right, I got into bed also.

But not to sleep. There came trooping into my harried mind all the old youthful terrors of the dark, and I lived over all those terror-haunted days when I dwelt in fear of Toi Wah or of a shadowy something, I knew not what.

Lying there in the dark, I resolved that morning would find me leaving that seemingly ghost-ridden place forever. My peace of mind, my happiness, to be free from fear—these things were worth all the fine old country places in the world. And with this resolution, I slept.

I slept far into the day, awaking at noon to find my wife had gone out with some of our neighbors for a game of tennis and afternoon tea. So, clearly, I could not arrange to leave until the next day. I must await my wife's return, and in the meantime formulate some sort of reasonable excuse to explain to her my precipitate return to town, after planning a year's sojourn in the country.

And then, too, it was daylight now, sober matter-of-fact daylight, and, as was always the case with me, the terrors of the night then seemed unreal, half forgotten nightmares. So I dismissed the subject from my mind for the time being, and set out for a long walk across the fields.

It was near dinner time when I returned. As I opened the door of the dining-room, my wife turned from where she stood by the fire-place to greet me, and I was again struck by her resemblance to Toi Wah. The arrangement of her hair heightened this effect. And when she smiled!—I cannot describe it! Such a sly, secret, feline smile!

"Robert," she said, as she came to me and put up her lips to be kissed. "Do you know what day this is?"

I shook my head.

"Why, it's my birthday, you forgetful boy! My twenty-first birthday, and I have a surprise for you.

"The old Buddhist priest, who taught me when I was a child gave me a flagon of rare old Chinese Lotus wine, when he parted from me, which I was to keep inviolate until my twenty-first birthday. I would be married then, he said, and on that day I was to unseal the old flagon and drink the wine with my husband in memory of my old teacher who would then be in the bosom of Nirvana.

"Look!" and she turned to the serving-table on which sat a small, squat wicker-covered flagon, and handed it to me.

I looked at it curiously. It was sealed with a small brass seal, which was stamped all over with dim Chinese characters.

"What are these characters?" I asked, handing her the flagon.

She looked closely at the seal.

"Oh! One of those wise old Buddhist sayings, which the Chinese stick on everything." She smiled. "Shall I translate it? I can, you know."

I nodded.

"'*Wine maketh the heart glad or sad, good or evil. Drink Oh! Man to thy choice!*'" she read.

Then she pulled off the seal and poured out the wine; a thick amber liquid, so heavy that it poured like thick

them. Its bouquet filled the room with a faint, far-off odor of lotus flowers.

"Shall we drink now, Robert, or shall we wait until dinner is served?"

"Let us drink now," I said, curious to taste this Eastern wine, with which I was not familiar.

"Amen!" said my wife, softly.

Then she spoke, rapidly and softly under her breath, a few Chinese words, as so I judged them to be, and we drank the wine. There was not a great deal in the flagon, and we drank it all before dinner was served.

As I sat at dinner a strange comfortable feeling gradually came over me. Distrust, fear, and apprehension died out of my mind, and my heart was light. My wife and I laughed and talked together as we had done in the days of our courtship. I was a different man.

After dinner we went into the music-room and she sang for me. Sang in a sweet low voice strange weird old songs of ancient China. Of the dragon banner floating in the sun, and the watch fires on the hills. Of old Tartar loves and hates. Of wrongs that never die, but pass on from age to age, from life to life, from death to death—unhasting, unending until the debt be paid.

I sat listening, dozing in a hazy mental languor, with the feeling foreign to me of late, that all was well with the world. I was peacefully happy, and my wife's sweet voice crooned on. Bedtime, the going up to our bedroom, and what followed after is only a blurred memory.

I awoke, or seemed to awake (now that I am in this madhouse I do not really know) far into the night.

I awoke with a feeling of suffocation, a sensation of impending dissolution. I could not move, I could not speak. I had a sense of something indescribably evil, loathsome, blood-curdling, that was hanging over me, threatening my very life.

I tried to open my eyes. The lids seemed to be weighted down. All the force of my will could only slightly open them. Through this slight opening, I saw my wife bending over me, and the eyes that looked at me *were the inscrutable eyes of Toi Wah!*

### *VI.*

SLOWLY she bent down—I could sense the delicate fragrance of her hair—and applied her sweet, soft lips to mine. Again I felt that I was suffocating, that the very breath of my life was being drawn from me.

I concentrated all my will in the effort to struggle, and with tremendous effort I was able feebly to move an arm. My wife hastily took her lips from mine and looked at me closely, with the cruel amber eyes of the great Tartar cat, whose bones lay in my garret.

Once more she leaned over and applied her lips to mine. I lay there in helpless lethargy, unable to move, but with an active mind that leaped back into the past, bringing to my memory all the old nursery tales of childhood of cats sucking the breath of sleeping children, of the folklore tales that I had heard of helpless invalids done to death by cruel cats who stole their breath from them.

I began to be aroused at last. Was my breath to be sucked from me by this half-human, half-cat that was bending over me? With a final despairing effort of my wine-sodden will, I raised my arms and pushed this soft sweet vampire from my breast and from the bed.

And then, as the cold sweat of fear poured from my trembling body, I shouted for help. At last my servant came running up the stairs and pounded on the door.

"What is it?" he called. "What is wrong, sir? Shall I go for the police?"

"Nothing is wrong," answered my wife calmly. She had risen from where I had thrown her and was arranging her disheveled hair. "Your master has had a terrible dream, that is all."

"It is a lie!" I shouted. "Do not leave me alone with this vampire!"

I sprang from bed, and, heedless of my wife's semi-nude condition, I flung open the door. She shrank back, but I seized her by the wrist, beside myself with nervous terror.

And then—there on her wrist—I saw! I looked closely to be sure. Then instantly all was clear to me. I was in doubt no longer. I *knew!*

"Look!" I shrieked. "Here on her wrist! Toi Wah's collar!" I do not know why I said it, or scarcely what I did say, but I knew it to be true!

"Toi Wah's collar!" I repeated. "She can't take it off! *She is changing into a cat!* Look at her eyes! Look at her hair! Soon she will be Toi Wah again with the collar about her neck, and then—"

And then I saw my wife disconcerted for the first time. I felt the arm I had seized, tremble in my frenzied grip.

"Why, Robert!" she stammered. "I—I found this on the attic floor yesterday. And—and—thinking it a curious old Chinese relic, I put it on my wrist. It's a bracelet, not a collar!"

"Take it off then!" I shouted. "Take it off! You can't! You can't, until you become Toi Wah again, and then it will be about your neck. Read what it says! It is in your accursed tongue!

"But you shall never live to madden me again with fear, to make my life a hell of peering eyes and padding feet, and then to suck my breath at last! I killed you once, I can do it again! And again and yet again in any shape the devils in hell may send you to prey upon honest men!"

And I seized her by her beautiful throat. I meant to choke her until those cruel yellow eyes started from their sockets, and then laugh as I saw her gasping in the last agony of death.

But I was cheated. The servants overpowered me, and I was brought here to this mad-house.

I said I was perfectly sane then. I say it now. And learned alienists, sitting in council, have agreed with me. Tomorrow I am to be discharged into the custody of my sweet cooing-voiced wife, who comes daily to see me. She kisses me with soft lying lips that long to suck my breath, or perhaps even rend the flesh of my throat with the little white teeth back of the cruel lips.

So tomorrow I will go forth—to die. To be murdered! I go to death just as surely as if the hangman waited to haul me to the gallows, or if the warden stood outside to escort me to the electric chair.

I *know* it! I have told the learned psychologists and doctors that I know it. But they laugh.

"All a delusion!" they exclaim. "Why, your little wife loves you with all her loyal heart. Even with your finger-prints a bluish bruise about her tender throat, she loved you. That night when you awoke, frightened, to find her bending over you, she was only kissing you, in an effort to soothe your troubled sleep."

But I *know!* Therefore, I am setting all this down so that when I am found dead the learned doctors may know that I was right and they were wrong. And so that Justice may be done.

And yet—perhaps nothing can be done. I have ceased to struggle. I have given up. Like the Oriental, I say, "*Who can escape his fate?*"

For I shall die by Chinese justice, a Buddhist revenge for killing the Tartar cat, Toi Wah. Toi Wah that I hated and feared, and have hated and feared through all the lives that the two of us have lived, far, far back to that time when the yellow sabre-toothed tiger seized my first-born and fled with him among the reeds and ferns of the Pale-

*(Continued on page 118)*

*Eerie Adventure and Mammoth Treasure Were Found in*

# THE GOLDEN CAVERNS

## *A Condensed Novel*

### *By* JULIAN KILMAN

WHEN Ericson quietly toppled over and the paddle slipped from his grasp, our canoe was instantly broadside in the rapids. But Zangaree immediately brought the heavily-laden craft head on, his skill once more saving our slender expedition from the disaster that had trailed us so persistently since leaving the large steamer at Itacoatiara.

A faint shout from the second canoe sounded through the din of racing water. Evidently Van Dusee and Hardy had observed our mishap. I waved a hand in reply, and then I bent over Ericson who lay with his eyes rolling. Instead of sunstroke, as I had assumed, he had been wounded; a thin stream of blood ran from his temple. Zangaree whirled the canoe to the small islet we were just passing. But we were too late. Ericson was dead.

The shock of our fellow-voyageur's death was still on me as, amid the amazing splendor of that tropical scene, we made preparations to dispose of the body. Much later in the night, when all were sleeping, I felt a tug at my mosquito netting, and in the dim starlight I made out Hardy's pioneer head, with its square-jawed face, peering at me.

He motioned me to follow him quietly. Wonderingly, I made my way after this soldier of fortune, who, by the sheerest good luck, we had picked up in the Brazilian capital. Presently he stopped.

"Do you wish to continue your journey?" he asked.

Despite Ericson's death, I could not think otherwise; already we had come four thousand miles, of which the last fifteen hundred had brought us into the very interior of the South American continent. Too much capital and energy had been expended for us lightly to abandon our project. And I said so.

"You misunderstand," he returned quickly. "It is not Ericson's finish that made me ask, *but the manner of it!*"

The thin edge of doubt as to Hardy's fortitude perhaps began to insert itself into my mind. He observed it.

"Damn it, man!" he exclaimed. "I am game. But you are to know that from now on we'll have to buck not only the elements, but that toad-faced *de* Silva as well."

At mention of the Spaniard who had tricked and nearly outmaneuvered us at Rio de Janiero with the officials, something like a chill came over me.

"What brings him into this?" I demanded.

Hardy's answer was dramatic enough.

"Only this," he said. "It is a little thing. But it killed Ericson."

I gazed at the slender blow-pipe arrow in Hardy's hand. It had done for our archaeologist.

"That type of arrow is unknown hereabouts," went on Hardy, "It is poisoned and is used by the Amajuca Indians six hundred miles back on the Amazon. It means that we are being followed."

The camp fire was dying out when Hardy and I returned from our talk, both of us determined to make the additional four hundred miles that we estimated lay between us and the point we planned to reach—and to gain it by land if the water route on the gradually diminishing stream was to afford our enemies too easy an opportunity to decimate us.

I stood there, surveying the sleeping figures of my comrades: Van Dusee, the true scientist, whose interest in his beloved hemiptera seemed to render him impervious to the sting of insect pests and the pains and dangers of our journey; young Anderson, son of the president of our Institute; Zangaree, sleeping in his giant strength like a child.

And Ericson! A lump came into my throat at the thought of the gallant fellow who had so suddenly come to an end. Had I known then what was in store for the surviving members of our little band, surely I would have cried aloud, for all told, counting the mighty Zangaree, the half-breeds and Indians, we numbered only ten men.

By the time the morning sun was flooding the ravine with light, we were all astir. Caching much of our supplies, we ferried to the right-hand bank of the stream farther down. Here, with no sign of the enemy we secreted our canoes in the bushes, and, distributing among ourselves ammunition, food, a light silk tent, blankets and scientific impedimenta, we shouldered our packs and started on the long hike inland.

For two days we made slow progress, because of the luxuriance of the undergrowth; but in time this gave way to vast primeval woods. Never shall I forget the solemn mystery of it! Trees rivaling in size the gigantic redwoods of California raised themselves to enormous height, where their tremendous columns spread out in Gothic curves, which interlaced to form a great matted roof of green—architecture of the Greatest of All Architects!

As we walked noiselessly but hurriedly under the lash of Hardy's impatience amid the thick carpet of decaying vegetation, we were hushed in spite of ourselves. Vivid orchids and marvelously-colored lichens smouldered upon the swarthy tree trunks. Climbing plants, monstrous and riotous in verdure, fought their way upward, seeking futilely at once to throttle tree-life and to reach the sunlight.

Of animal life there was little movement amid the majestic vaulted aisles which stretched from us as we pursued our way; but the slight though constant agitation far above us told of that multitudinous world of snake and monkey, bird and sloth, which lived in the sunshine and regarded with wonder our puny stumbling figures in the depths below. At dawn the howler monkeys and parrakeets filled the air with shrill chatter; and in the hot hours came the drone of insects.

As yet there had been no indication that any one was following us. Indeed, we seemed to be untold miles from civi-

ization and I was commenting to young Anderson on the likelihood of our escape from the pursuit of *de* Silva when I caught a look in Hardy's eyes.

"Oh, pshaw!" I exclaimed later, slightly nettled. "You are pessimistic, Hardy. Had *de* Silva been after us we should surely have heard from him before this."

"No. That isn't so," retorted Hardy. "Our leaving the river has deceived him. I am satisfied that he planned an ambush farther along the stream. In a short time he'll discover we have given him the slip. Then he'll be after us."

"And just why, Hardy," I demanded, "is this insane Spaniard following us?"

Hardy's expression was quizzical.

"I have a sort of hunch—that's all," he returned, non-committally.

The next day one of our Indians was missing. He had been sent back over the trail a mile or so to recover a small rifle that had been lost. Hardy himself and young Anderson made the tiresome hike to the rear to learn if possible the whereabouts of the Indian. Later, when the two rejoined us without the Indian, Hardy did not have anything to say.

Anderson told me afterwards that they had found the Indian curled up at the foot of a tree. He was dead without a mark on him.

Depressing as was this development, our little party found scant time to discuss it. The way had grown much more difficult, for our road persistently ascended. Huge trees now gave place to palms, with thick underbrush growing between. We traveled entirely by compass, but missed Ericson, who had been a navigator and had from time to time "shot the sun" to verify our position.

On the fifth day we encountered a tremendous wilderness of bamboo, which grew so thickly that we could only penetrate it by cutting a pathway with the machetes and bill-hooks of the Indians. It took us a long day, with only two pauses of a half hour each to get clear of this yellow-walled obstacle.

Once free of it, we were glad to throw ourselves down for the first real rest which Hardy was willing that we should take. But it proved to be of short duration, because Anderson, eternally on the move, discovered, less than half a mile away, that another path recently had been cut through the bamboo nearly paralleling ours.

That night we slept behind some slight attempt at a barricade. This protection, consisting of a circle of thorn brush piled three feet high, at least sufficed to keep out a few wailing animals that filled the air with weird noises, and most of us rested the night through without fear.

Next morning I discovered the presence of a soil that was like sand. This was consistent with the dryness of the air, but was disconcerting as I knew that the terrain and climate of the spot whither we were bound was of no such character as that which surrounded us.

It was about this time that young Anderson made a second startling discovery, and one fraught with momentous consequences for our expedition. Our compass was out of order. This defection was serious in the extreme. It meant that we were lost, for there was no knowing how long the instrument had been untrue.

The day went badly. The farther we progressed the more sandy it became. We seemed about to enter upon a great desert, and to make matters worse our Indians showed signs of discontent. Our supply of water was low; still we knew that only a day's march behind us we has passed a stream of clear water. Study of the maps that night failed to account for any considerable expanse of desert, and it was decided to push boldly across on the chance of later picking up our route.

We waited two days while Zangaree and the half-breeds made the trip back for additional water. Then we started. If our suffering in the past had been great, it now increased a hundredfold. The heat, instead of having that suffocating quality peculiar to humidity, was burning in its intensity; and, to add to our discomfort, Hardy kept us going at top speed.

In this the rest of us felt he was justified, as there could be no doubt that *de* Silva, with a larger party than ours, was in the general neighborhood, and looking for us. Hour after hour, until four days dragged by, we trudged on late into the night, with the aid of an erratic compass, through that Sahara-like sea of rippling sand.

By the severest rationing of our supply it was estimated that we had less than one day's water. Our situation was serious. To go back was as deadly as to go on.

And it was at this point that our spirits were sent to low ebb by Zangaree's astounding discovery that we had doubled in our tracks in the night and for two days *had been traveling in a circle!*

## II

I THINK even young Anderson, for the time being, lost heart at sight of that bit of inanimate evidence—a trifle of card board that had been tossed aside—which drove home the knowledge that we were hopelessly lost.

But not for long was that restless youth depressed, and while Hardy and the rest of us sat in solemn council that evening, he wandered off by himself. Perhaps he had been gone half an hour when we heard him shout:

*"Water!"*

We ran toward him, and presently came to what might be called a minute oasis. Quickly a spade was brought and work was started at the damp spot located in the center.

In the meantime I studied the environs. A few scrubby bushes grew about, while at one side stood a low triangular column of stones. I discovered that each stone had cut in it a series of cuneiform inscriptions which even the untold years of contact with the eroding sand had failed to eradicate.

Quite idly I had laid my arm on the top when a curious thing happened; half of the upper stone, under the slight weight of my elbow, swung down silently, as if on a ballasted hinge. Then I stared into the interior of the column, which I had supposed solid, and saw, to my amazement, that a narrow stairway led down.

It was the work of only a moment for me to crawl in, and presently, in pitch darkness, I was following the steep stairway. My fingers told me that the sides were firm and well-bricked.

I came shortly to what seemed to be a tunnel, and in this I spent some fifteen minutes, finding the air good and congratulating myself on my successful descent and discovery of the unique underground passage.

I was about to start up again to tell my companions of my strange discovery when there was an explosion. It lifted the helmet from my head and was followed by the rattle of stones and debris that deluged and buffeted and pounded me until I sank under the weight of the impact.

When I regained consciousness I lay in the open air. Anderson was bending over me solicitously.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Here you are—all sound except for a cracked arm."

"What happened?" I asked.

He grinned at me. "Why, we were all helping at the water-hole when Van Dusee missed you. He remembered that you had been standing by the stone column one minute; the next you were gone, absolutely vanished, just as if the earth had opened up and swallowed you."

"Which in fact it had," I said, grimly. "But wasn't the top open?"

"Open!" shouted Anderson. "I should say not. Hardy and I hammered that pile of stone and we couldn't make a dent in it. We never thought of trying the top. Finally Hardy slipped a little dynamite under the column and we followed you down the stairway."

By degrees I got my strength back.

"Ready for some big news?" Anderson said, presently.

I nodded.

"All right, then. Hang on now. We came to South America to get scientific data, didn't we?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, that's all gone by the board now," went on the young man. "We're going to explore the Caverns of the Ataruipe."

The "Caverns of the Ataruipe" meant precisely nothing to me.

"Listen to me," he explained. "The Ataruipe are a lost race of people. Hardy picked up the dope during the time he hung around Rio; he says the archives of the Brazilian government are full of old maps purporting to give the location of treasure; some of these maps were made in the fifteenth century and actually purport to show where the ElDorado may be found.

"It is said that in earlier days expedition after expedition was fitted out and despatched to find the 'Gilded King,' a chap whose people had such quantities of gold that they built their houses of the solid metal. But the best story of all is that of the Caverns of the Ataruipe, a race that lived more than a thousand years ago, and came from Asia; they were wonderful goldsmiths, possessing untold quantities of gems and all the precious metals. The legend is that the Ataruipe used to come in large numbers down the rivers to the coast to trade, scattering among the natives quantities of gold pieces of exquisite design such as had never before been seen; but that after a certain date no one ever saw them again; nor has anyone ever been able to locate the particular part of the country where they resided."

As the young man ran on a light began to dawn in my mind.

"And *de* Silva?" I interjected.

"Sure! You've struck it!" was Anderson's swift response. "Hardy says the officials long have felt that the Ataruipe came from hereabouts, and Hardy claims the Spaniard, representing some of them, suspects our expedition of searching for the treasure."

"Were the cuneiform inscriptions on the stone column examined?"

"Certainly," said Anderson. "Hardy got all that. I never saw him so interested before. He swears we have struck it rich."

Suddenly I realized that my throat was burning with thirst.

"How about some water?" I asked.

In a moment a brimming cup of the precious fluid was at my lips. I drank greedily and, I fear, with little thought as to the source of supply.

While we were yet discussing the altered aspect of our situation a voice hailed us, and we turned to discover Hardy just emerging from the hole that gaped where the triangular stone column had stood. Following him came Van Dusee and the rest of the party.

When all were safely out Hardy touched a match to the long fuse he had laid from a mine placed under the obstruction in the tunnel, which had prevented further progress. There came a dull *boom*, a whirl of air, and then all was still.

"Now, sir," announced Hardy. "In the morning we shall see what we shall see."

There was little sleep for any of us that night, and before dawn we were ready for the descent. My crippled arm made the way arduous for me, but it would have been doubly hard had not young Anderson lavished on me so splendidly his surplus strength. Eagerly our party trailed along that tunnel, led by Hardy and Van Dusee.

The dynamite had done its work well, as the passageway, which ever continued to descend, was entirely cleared. After journeying, as near as we could judge, about three-quarters of a mile, we came to a turn which appeared to be carrying us slowly upward and almost back in the direction from which we came.

I noted that our candles were burning brightly and that the air remained surprisingly fresh. There was little conversation. Once Hardy spoke abruptly to the halfbreed Gomez, who pressed forward a trifle precipitately.

The way grew suddenly light and I had about decided that the other end of the mysterious tunnel would terminate at the surface, when there came a cry from ahead.

"At last!" shouted Van Dusee.

We hurried forward, breathless with interest, and found ourselves confronted by a high but very narrow stile, consisting of six steps of some twenty-four inches each, and glaring down, with jaws wide-open and huge paws outstretched immediately over the apex, was a towering sculptured monster with brilliant green eyes.

The sight of that crouching beast, obviously placed there as a guard, was one to appall the stoutest heart. In turn, we passed under the stupendous overhanging paws, all save Gomez, making way with a display of confidence that we were far from feeling.

In a moment our blinking eyes beheld that for which we came: a gigantic cavern, nearly light as day. I think the wonder of that moment, as I became accustomed to the peculiar radiance of the light and my eyes took in the many evidences of an extinct, yet highly cultivated, life, will never leave me.

Row on row of seats in the form of a huge amphitheater lay in cathedral silence before our fascinated gaze. At the sides there extended beautifully-cut galleries, hewn out of the solid crystal rock and giving mute testimony of a civilization at least as ancient as that of the Greeks. Here and there the frescowork was interrupted to give place to heroic-sized figures in pure white marble as marvelously sculptured as anything that ever left the mallet of Praxiteles. There were scores of them!

High above, I was interested to note that the ceiling was of the same rock-formation that had crystal clearness, which accounted for the plentitude of light, as I was certain we were not more than a hundred feet below the surface.

Slowly we began a circuit of that wonder-home of a lost people. To the right lay a vaulted passage, and we came presently to that. It was darker here, and young Anderson and I, detaching ourselves from the rest of the party, made our way along it. We came soon to a circular series of highly ornamented chambers. Anderson was slightly in advance of me, and as he peered into the central and larger one of these I heard him draw in his breath sharply.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, awe-struck.

My eyes followed his into the beautifully tapestried room, and there, seated in a high-backed, canopied, thronelike chair, extravagantly adorned with glistening jewels, was the figure of a man!

He was apparently in the full vigor of existence. The cast of his face was Mongolian. *And he was smiling!*

It was too lifelike! We drew back.

Then the certainty that he could not be living forced itself home; and we entered that sacrosanct interior. Scores of highly-colored tapestries were suspended from the walls, the exposed portions of which showed mural decorations finer than any I had ever seen before and which, in tint and conception, were essentially Oriental.

Closer view of the man who smiled at us showed a skin texture which even the

most wonderful embalming could not conceal as that of death.

Our sense of having profaned the regal place presently wore off, and Anderson, as much, I fancied, from a nervous reaction as anything, moved nearer to the figure and lightly tapped it with the bamboo stick he carried.

"How are you, old top?" he asked.

An instant later the man, chair and canopy absolutely dissolved before our eyes and lay on the raised dais in a small pile of dust through which the numerous diamonds and opals gleamed at us like evil spirits.

"Let's get out of here," I muttered.

*III.*

THE EXTENT of the underground system seemed endless, as long, high-arched corridors opened up in vistas before our astonished gaze.

From another point I could hear the excitable Van Dusee, enraptured over some new-found curio or work of art. Making careful note of our course, Anderson and I pressed on, coming shortly to a rough, unfinished cavern that glowed with sunlight as if exposed to the open sky. There came a shout in my ear. It was from Anderson.

"See!" he exclaimed.

And well might he cry out, for in the center of the chamber lay piles of delicately contrived golden goblets, mixed with hideous-jawed dragons, flying-birds, pedestals of intricate pattern—all in gold! But most astounding of all were the replicas of human figures in gleaming yellow metal, some of them quite of life-size, others in miniature, that tilted here and there among the shining mass—all of the most exquisite workmanship, though many pieces were dented and broken; apparently the mass had been allowed to accumulate by the addition, from time to time, of defective pieces.

However, one piece, the reproduction of a slender female figure just budding into womanhood, about eighteen inches in height, lay quite near us, as if unwittingly it had been dropped. Young Anderson picked it up. The figure was heavy but quite perfect. In silent amaze we studied that exhibit of a handicraft that surely would have brought a shout of appreciation from Benvenuto Cellini, the great Italian goldsmith.

I was about to stroll over to the pile of gold, when I heard the sound of someone running. Then a man burst into the chamber. His entrance was unseemly, and I turned to chide him.

With difficulty I recognized the half-breed Gomez. His eyes were dilated, his features transformed, as, mouthing unintelligible noises, he ran toward that heap of yellow gold.

If his appearance was terrifying, the shriek that now left his lips came as a thing yet more awful. For before our gaze, while he was still a good thirty feet from the gold, there was a spurt of smoke from the running man, and he stumbled, curled up in a blaze of fire, and actually *burned to death!*

In my weakened condition my senses reeled at the sight and I caught at Anderson for support. Hardy and Van Dusee were soon with us, and again our worthy leader demonstrated his quick perception and resourcefulness.

"Don't move!" he commanded. "The place is full of death points!"

A glimmering of his reasoning came to me, and I raised my eyes to what constituted the ceiling of that extraordinary cavern. The answer flashed to me that the artificers of the Ataruipe must have fashioned portions of that wondrously clear crystal formation overhead into gigantic burning glasses which, in that land of eternal sunshine, daily projected down into the cavern focal points of condensed sun's rays that were terrific in their heat units.

But Hardy was demonstrating, and we watched him. With a long bamboo the ingenious chap *felt* out the deadly heat points, each of which in turn discovered itself by sending a spurt of flame from the end of the pole.

"Altogether, there were nearly fifteen of the deadly contrivances in that cavern, none of which, with the exception of the most powerful one that had killed Gomez, *being visible to the human eye!*

The reason for this was that the focal point invariably centered about five feet ten inches from the basaltic floor—the precise point where the head of the ordinary man would be while walking.

But if the discoveries made by Anderson and me were remarkable, those of the rest of the party were equally so. Zangaree had stumbled into a chamber evidently reserved for the woman of that lost people. Here, mounted gems of unrivaled quality and size abounded, most of them proving that the Ataruipe as jewelers were equally at home in precious stones and gold.

The apparel of the men in our party was filled to overflowing with the scintillant fragments; Zangaree, in pure Afric joy, tossed a handful into the air and in the unusual light of the cavern they sparkled like fireworks as they fell. From the walls, lustrous opals flashed at us their iridescent rays; there were gems underfoot, cleverly laid in fantastic mosaics such as the mind of modern man never had conceived.

It was all too overwhelming, and we were a sobered party indeed when again we assembled for the very necessary purpose of outlining our future plans. Of course, each one of us was rich, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and it seemed the end, or beginning of everything.

I think that for the time being there was not a single one of us, lounging there in the pit of that ghostly amphitheater, who gave a thought to the long hard way we had come, or to the thousands of miles of jungle and river that lay between us and the consummation of our desires.

Night came on apace, and soon we found ourselves enveloped in a darkness that was only saved from completeness by the trifling fire Hardy had built. Van Dusee presently sprawled down at my side, and pulled at his pipe, talked calmly, as I had never heard him talk before. For once the entomologist was gone. The thing, our experience, had swept him off his feet; his pet subject was forgotten; he had gained new orientation.

"Such artists!" he breathed prayerfully. "Those sculptured women! That exquisite miniature of Bobby's! And all for what? To what end? Of what avail? Ah! The futility of it!"

And again he murmured, half to himself:

"To think that a thousand, yea, two thousand years ago, these wonderful people lived, breathed and had their being in this very place! What were their thoughts, their pleasures—and what, in Heaven's name, became of the last of them?"

I told him of our experience with the figure whch at Anderson's touch had disintegrated so swiftly that the incident seemed like black magic. And for the first time it occurred to me that, aside from the man I had just described, none of us had seen a single skeleton or other evidence of the human occupants.

Van Dusee laughed shortly when I put my query.

"We found their burying place, all right," he said.

"Where?" I asked.

"Thousands of them," his voice went on, and in the darkness it seemed that I *must* be dreaming; "rows on rows of them up in those interminable galleries, each body—or what was left of it— in a handsomely woven basket, with gold trimming. Hardy and I passed along touching an occasional one for the striking effect of seeing it crumble into nothingness—as your king did. Ah, the pity

of it that poor Ericson did not live to see this!"

Van Dusee's voice droned on, and I fell asleep. I suppose I must have lain there for several hours, getting only such rest as is granted to a man with a recently-broken arm, when I awoke with a start. It was just dawn.

Hardy was on his knees, his rifle poised, and his keen eyes fixed on the spot where the massive green-eyed dragon kept guard over the stile. He signed to me not to disturb the others who still slept.

In a moment I detected some moving object as it came down our side of that guardian monster. It was a man! I glanced swiftly at those of our group. They were all accounted for. This meant either that our trail had been discovered from above, or that there were surviving Ataruipe—which last was incredible.

Even as my mind grappled with the problem, another figure followed stealthily. Then Hardy's gun spoke. The noise of the explosion seemed out of all proportion. The first man ran a little, then suddenly bent over as if hurt in the side. He was sliding to the ground when his follower ran to his assistance.

Hardy and I by this time were nearing the two strangers. The second man was struggling furiously to get his companion np the steep stairway beneath the dragon. Just as we came up, he succeeded with a final heave in landing the wounded man on the top step of the stile. Hardy raised his gun. I shouted:

"Don't shoot!"

Then a dreadful thing happened. The apex-stone of the stair seemed suddenly to sink beneath the combined weight of the two men. An instant later, with the swiftness of thought, the gigantic paws of that stone monster descended. They struck and crushed to death the two puny men who lay beneath; one of the bodies disappeared over the other side.

And as Hardy and I stared at this additional example of diabolical ingenuity, the apex-stone reappeared and the paws, as if alive, slowly began to elevate themselves to their original position, by some odd quirk of fate, surely not contemplated by the builder, carrying with them the body of the slain man that had remained.

## *IV.*

NO MORE was necessary to advise us that *de* Silva had stumbled onto our blundering trail.

The dead man, caught in that ghastly embrace, was a white whom Hardy readily recognized as an associate of the evil Spaniard in Rio de Janiero.

Though we had been but twenty-four hours in the caverns of the Ataruipe, we had observed no other sign of egress than the one that led to the water hole. Nor, in fact, was there any reason to assume that the original occupants found it necessary to go abroad very frequently. And while it was likely there were other exits, yet in the vast system of that underground world, with but a limited supply of food, it would be folly for us to attempt to locate them.

So it was that all of us felt we should at once attempt to make our escape the way we had entered, even allowing for the probable attack planned by *de* Silva.

First, therefore, we gave attention to that not unimportant matter as to how much treasure we should take with us. It went without saying that we planned a return with better transportation facilities, but that was in the future and much beclouded by the uncertain course of the divers persons in our band, once we were separated. Curious, indeed, was the effect on the individual members of our party of this struggle between cupidity and the instinct to survive the long journey home.

Like drunken men, the half breed Castro and the Indians wandered around, hopelessly mulling over the golden treasure there in such quantities for them to take, and which, oddly enough, seemed to attract the Indians so much more than the gems.

Anderson and I stowed our pockets with diamonds and rubies and opals, but the youth also clung to the miniature he had acquired on the first day. The artist in Van Dusee, so long latent in this man of science, now blazed forth with the fierce light of a falling star. Above all else, he yearned for the party to carry to New York one of the surpassingly beautiful heroic-sized female figures. For an hour he seriously expostulated with Hardy, but received, I fear, slight sympathy from any of us, as one of the statues alone must have weighed many hundreds of pounds.

Our lack of interest in his project left Van Dusee in a pet, and he vowed finally that he would not remove a single article from the caverns. Hardy, always in character, asserted that he intended to have both eyes of the dragon guarding the apex of the stile, and in fact, actually did ascend to the top step from which, by a daring feat of climbing, he swung himself to the lower jaw and coolly proceeded to chisel the magnificent emerald-eyes from their ancient sockets. All this within five feet of the ghastly trophy as yet in the paws of the stone animal!

About four o'clock in the afternoon we met for the last time in front of the gigantic stone brute, his empty eye-sockets seeming to give him an expression of increased ferocity as they bore done on us.

Van Dusee, in a condition bordering on nervous breakdown, was begging for just a little more time that he might get with his camera some final views of the godlike stone images. So far as I know, the entomologist actually had made good his word, for when we left the caverns of the Ataruipe he did not have with him a single gem or bit of precious metal; merely the camera with its recorded impressions.

Presently Hardy took the lead over the fearsome stile. It had been discovered that there was no danger from the massive paws so long as the top stone did not receive more than what was equal to the weight of a normal man. This Hardy had tested. Surely that contrivance was an example of remarkable hydraulics!

With Zangaree, he cautiously moved along the five-foot golden statue that it had been decided to take to the surface; and, by dint of much easing and shifting of the heavy object, the two men succeeded in getting it safely past the trap-stone.

As sick man of the expedition—and what expeditions do not have their sick man?—I brought up the rear with Anderson. Busied with my own thoughts, I failed to note that one of the Indians had dropped out.

Keeping my eyes on Anderson's back, just a step below me, I slid my scant hundred and fifty-odd pounds (and thanked God for my light weight!) on to the apex-stone, which was about four feet square and too broad to avoid entirely. As I worked my way along, for I was sitting, I was horrified to note a sinking sensation—the block of stone was descending!

Then the air was filled with two shrieks: mine, as I flung myself from that place of death, and the cry of a man *behind* me.

The terrific paws, cutting the air like rapiers, literally beheaded the Indian, who had stolen back in his greed for more gold, and then, in following me too closely, had entrusted his weight to the trap with mine.

The gruesome tragedy depressed all of us, and I am certain we were relieved when the immedate turn in the tunnel shut off from our view the stone monster, then in the very act of elevating his two dreadful paws and leering at us, I could swear, with living malignancy for the desecration of his features.

We had not proceeded far along the passageway when it became evident that our enemies were waiting for us.

The first indication was the different character of the air. It seemed closer, and not to have any movement. The thought at once leapt into our minds that very likely the entrance by the water-hole had been blocked.

As time passed and we worked our way up the rather steep incline, there could be no doubt about the situation. The thought was a terrifying one, and we pressed on, eager to know the worst.

When finally we stood at the end of the tunnel there was not a ray of light from above. Wedged midway of the stair, reposed two of the cuneiform stones that had first attracted my attention. Apparently quantities of sand had been shoveled into the hole, for much of the fine stuff had trickled on down the steps almost to our feet.

Use of dynamite in that narrow way was, of course, out of the question; imprisoned in the tunnel, we could not possibly live through the blast. Hardy, therefore, set to work promptly to dislodge the stone. This was dangerous for the reason that it was literally suspended over him as he labored and if suddenly released it meant an avalanch that would be certain to destroy him who stood beneath.

The problem was cleverly solved by Hardy, who ascertained the location of the "key" strain. He proceeded by inserting immediately above this spot one foot of the golden statue we had lugged with us. Surely it was sacrilege to use that triumph of the goldsmith's art as a crowbar!

But the statue nevertheless was effective as an instrument, as Hardy attached a rope around the bust which projected to within ten feet of the tunnel; and from this point of comparative safety the men put their full weight on the rope. There followed a moment of intense strain, the golden figure, of none too stiff an alloy, appeared to bend—and then it came, a perfect welter of flying sand and debris that left us gasping.

In a few minutes this cleared, and we could see Hardy grinning at us through the blessed daylight that poured down that stairway once more.

"Who'll be the first to greet *de* Silva?" he demanded.

I recall heretofore setting forth a number of reasons why we decided to attempt our escape via the water hole tunnel. It is my belief, on more mature reflection, that with all my care I have failed to state the most important one: that of the sheer desire of the majority of our party—a desire that had been fed by the continued hounding *de* Silva had given us—to meet him and fight it out.

At any rate, the manner in which Hardy answered his own question by leaping up the stairway, afforded every evidence of how *he* felt about it.

We followed closely. But nothing in the line ahead of me seemed to occur, and to our astonishment, on gaining the surface, there was no one to meet us. Soon we found the explanation, for not far distant lay the bodies of a white man and an Indian. They were locked together in death, while a rod farther on was the body of another Indian. He had been shot in the back. Scattered about in the sand, evidently where the running man had dropped them when hit, were numbers of brilliant gems. *They were gems of the Ataruipe!*

In frank wonder, we gazed upon that indisputable proof that at least some of the members of the *de* Silva party, unbeknown to us, had got past the fatal stile and explored a portion of the caverns. But where was *de* Silva? And what had become of the rest of his crowd?

Our interest in this matter soon gave way to that far more important problem as to the direction in which we were to move. In the apparel of the dead Spaniard Zangaree discovered a compass, and while this seemed almost heaven-sent, yet it did not tell us the way we had come.

A final effort was made to dislodge from the debris the beautiful statue which we had used as a lever, but it was solidly buried and we soon gave over the attempt. Then, with little further discussion, we shoved off, following the trail of the many feet that led to the east from where we had found the gems in the sand.

We had not gone far when it became evident that those ahead of us were struggling with the transportation of heavy objects, which it was thought might prove to be golden statues. The correctness of this surmise was later borne out in a dreadful manner, for about four o'clock in the afternoon we came upon one of the beautiful objects. It lay in the sand and only a few yards away were three more dead men. Again two of them were Indians and the third a white, the features of all three being horribly slashed with the knives that had been used in the fighting.

Night overtook us still on the trail of the *de* Silva party, which now, judging from the foot-marks, consisted of about six men. We slept well, and at dawn pressed on.

The unexpected happened—and it came as a glorious surprise—for by ten in the morning we sighted signs of vegetation, and an hour later were nearing the exact point of our departure into the desert the week before.

This quick return drove home forcibly that near-tragedy of our four days' wandering in a desert which, after all, was comparatively small in extent.

Once enabled to shield ourselves beneath the trees from the sun's powerful rays, Hardy appeared willing to permit us to loaf a bit, and so it was that we whites had an opportunity to take stock of ourselves. Poor Van Dusee was thin to the point of emaciation, and I verily believe the man was wasting away as much from disappointment as from hardship. Anderson, brilliant-eyed and lean, was the same enthusiast, while the imperturbable Hardy seemed not to have altered a whit: he was the identical, brick-red, level-eyed, well-fleshed individual that we had first encountered in a cafe in Rio de Janiero in January. As for myself, I must have looked bad, as my arm had given me constant pain.

By this time we felt that *de* Silva deemed our party to have been buried alive in the Caverns of the Ataruipe, for he had not taken the slightest pains to conceal his trail. Thus it was that the tables, in fact, had turned. *We were now pursuing de Silva!*

No one of us voiced that thought, but that it was in the minds of each there could be no doubt. Personally, I know that I did not care to analyse my own attitude toward the cowardly Spaniard. I did not dare to! But what remained unnecessary to phrase in words was that if *de* Silva did escape with his booty to Rio de Janiero, no one of our party would have any opportunity to visit again the wonderland of the Ataruipe. And this, especially to Hardy (for entirely mundane reasons) and to Van Dusee (for the purely esthetic) was unthinkable.

We pushed on, encountering fresh signs of the expedition ahead of us which evidently, owing to the heavy treasure its members carried, was making slower progress than we were. Very shortly we came through our hard-won channel in the bamboos, and from then on we kept sharp lookout for *de* Silva.

On our third morning in that interminable brushwood tract, while Anderson was building a breakfast fire for which Zangaree and the Indians were collecting dry wood, Van Dusee, who had strolled on a bit, called back to us quietly:

"In that bush over there to the right," he said, "is a white man. He is spying on us."

It was only a moment before Anderson and Hardy, guns in hand, were on their way. I shouted a warning and followed more slowly. Suddenly Hardy lowered his rifle, and when I came up both he and young Anderson were silently regarding a bit of thick brushwood.

And well might they stare, for there, leering out at us, through the foliage, was the face of *de* Silva. It was livid and ghastly, and a number of vicious-looking red ants were moving jerkily around the face.

Closer inspection was not needed to verify *de* Silva's decease; but as the manner of it also concerned us we did

Immediately back of the brush in which had been thrust this shocking exhibit there was evidence of a furious struggle. The Spaniard's body also had been knifed, as were the others, and this within comparatively recent hours, as the fresh appearance of the wounds testified.

There was no sign of his companions, and somehow the conviction took form in our minds that *de* Silva—a man who at one time, we learned afterwards, had been a professor of mathematics—very likely the last surviving white man in his party, had been set upon by the others and murdered.

But we had little time or spirit to expend in comparison for this villain, who, after all, had received his just deserts, and soon we were again on our way. The Indians ahead of us may or may not have suspected our presence; at any rate, they were now making as good speed as we were, in spite of the fact that they still clung to the heavy golden statue.

We reached the vast primeval wood, without apparently gaining on them. Our burning desire was to get to the river at least as soon as the Indians so that that little matter of the possession of our canoes might be definitely settled, for without the assistance of our light craft we were, in the face of the rapidly approaching rainy season, doomed to certain death amid the maze of that alluring yet deadly tropical fairy land.

We had spent one day in pushing on through the big woods, when a most untoward event overtook us. That was the sudden and complete breakdown of poor Van Dusee. Day by day, I had observed his failing strength and I knew that it was on his nerve alone he had kept up with the rest of us. Poor chap! He lay now at full length amid the vaulted silences of those stupendous trees, babbling first of his beloved *hemiptera* and again of the profound art in the sculpturing of the Ataruipe. It was not permissible to carry him, for the man was actually dying before our eyes.

The pitiful sight was too much even for the hardened Hardy, whose eyes once actually filled with tears as he regarded the form of the plucky, devoted, defeated, over-idealistic man of science. At noon that day Van Dusee closed his eyes for the last time, and we buried him as reverently, but as quickly, as possible. No time was there now for sentiment. The delay of six hours might ultimately prove to be our death warrant.

All that unending night we drove on until at times it seemed that I myself must follow Van Dusee. However, dawn came at last, and with it the definite knowledge that Hardy had led us correctly, for there in the distance lay the fringe of verdure defining the course of the river that meant for us home and safety.

In that moment we needed no spur, and very soon we came abreast of the hiding place of our canoes. Zangaree, bounding ahead, disappeared into the thicket. His black face reappeared almost immediately.

No necessity for him to speak. His expression told.

*Both canoes were gone!*

## V.

IN MY hypersensitive condition a pall of black despair settled over me. Here we were, rich beyond belief in precious gems and holding the key of knowledge of fabulous, undreamed-of wealth—and yet about to die like defenseless stricken animals! The irony of it!

But it was not so with Hardy and Anderson. With great energy, they searched the locality for traces of the miscreants (whom it had been hoped we had passed in the night), and, finding traces of them still fresh, set off in the manner of hounds in chase.

The two men had not far to go, for in less than an hour they reported back to us, procured more ammunition and led the way. So it came about that, nearing them silently, we had our first view of the men who had killed *de* Silva. There were four of them, all Indians, hunched together in a circle on the bank of the river. One of them was talking. To one side, tilting rakishly against a tree, stood a three-quarter size statue of exquisite proportions done in solid gold.

There it was, prime art of the Ataruipe, pulled, hauled, carried and dragged thither by an infinity of patience and endurance on the part of those aborigines, who now gave no heed to the play of the sunlight on that marvelous work of the goldsmiths; instead they were entirely engrossed in their own affairs. Our canoes were not visible, but we believed they were launched in the water, which at this point was placid and deep.

Hardy had just left us to get close to the river, when something, or someone of us, moved with too little caution, for the next instant the Indians were up, and, catching their treasure, ran down the bank of the stream. In full cry, we followed.

It has been said that the pen is mightier than the sword, and the sentiment is as pretty as it is ancient; but of one thing I am certain and that is, even in this enlightened age, the sword, allegorical and actual, is a much swifter instrument than the pen.

Much happened in the next thirty seconds. Our two canoes rode the water near at hand. Into one of them two of the Indians, with the help of a third, cast the gold statue, the first two following it with their bodies. In a moment they reached midstream. But the canoe began to sink.

Several shots split the air. I saw the two remaining Indians, now seated in our other canoe, were shooting at Hardy and young Anderson. Their fire was promptly returned. It proved deadly. Both Indians were hit, and the canoe began to drift.

Meanwhile, the Indians in the sinking canoe were fighting to shift the heavy weight of the statue, which must have punctured the bottom. They up-ended the figure precariously near the bow. The canoe listed suddenly, going nearly under water, and in that same instant there was a flash and into the murky stream shot the figure of gold. But none of us had eyes for that, because our ears were being filled with a succession of horrid cries.

They came from the swimming Indians, who perished miserably. The river was alive with crocodiles.

Hardy always has maintained that even had we not recovered our own canoes as we finally did that day, in time we could have located those of *de* Silva's. But I have questioned it. That the Spaniard secreted his canoes, without permitting the Indians to know their whereabouts, I was satisfied; and this, it seemed to me, was confirmed by the fact that the Indians had made so surely for our canoes, the location of which they must have found when de Silva retraced his course to the point where Ericson had been killed. All of which meant to me that the other canoes were well-hidden, indeed.

Of the long journey back to Itacoatiara, where we were to catch the steamer, there is little to tell. Hardy attempted a rough valuation of the gems and odd bits of gold that our expedition carried. On the most conservative basis, it ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and there was really no telling what the wealthy collectors of unique stones would be willing to pay for some of our gems, which were of a size and clarity beyond description.

Plans were discussed for a return to the Caverns of the Ataruipe next year, and at Itacoatiara our two loyal Indians left us after having been bound to secrecy by oaths as formidable and impressive as the ingenuity of Hardy could make them.

That the doughty Hardy himself considered this method of questionable efficacy was evidenced by the droll expression of his eyes during the mummery. He, in fact, was placing entire reliance on the inability of the dull-minded fellows to find their way back even if they tried, coupled with the knowledge that the faithful Zangaree, who was to leave us but a short distance farther along, would be able to account for the Indians until our plans for return were perfected. Castro, the remaining half-breed, took the steamer with us for the long ride down the Amazon River to Rio de Janiero, and presented a much more difficult problem. There had never been a time when Hardy completely trusted the half-breed, though it was true he had not once during the entire experience by word or deed shown any sign of treachery.

At the Brazilian capital Anderson and I went to a hotel, leaving our companion to look after the half-breed. Hardy's plan was frankly to go to the officials and attempt an arrangement whereby the three of us, under proper guaranties, might be authorized to lead an expedition in behalf of "The United States of Brazil" to the Caverns of the Ataruipe.

On the second day, and while no word yet had come from Hardy, our rooms in the hotel were rifled in our absence and almost one-third of the gems stolen. Anderson had deposited with the hotel proprietor for safe-keeping his golden replica and a goodly share of our gems; the rest we had secreted about our rooms or carried on our persons.

We were totally unable to decide whether or not the thief had been inspired by a knowledge of our treasures. It was true we had been regarded curiously by many of the loungers about the hotel lobby and in the streets, but no mention had been made of our experience.

We were debating the advisability of reporting to the police, but were rather hoping Hardy would come to us before we took this step. The following day, a Tuesday, we were surprised to receive a visit from a pompous-looking official. In hitchy English he informed us that as a special favor he had come to advise *los Americanos* that they were about to be charged with the murder of one *de* Silva, and that officers with warrants were soon to be on hand.

Then the gentleman grinned with surprising amiability, and added:

"Ze next steamair for New York, she leave in three hour."

He still stood, hat in hand, saying nothing further.

Suddenly it came over me what he wanted. *He was out for himself!*

Frequently since that incident, I have laughed at the quickness with which Anderson and I leapt at his fat, smug person. In less time than it takes to tell it, we had booted, hauled and dragged that chap out into the hall, where Anderson finished him off with a neat black eye for good measure. The flurry attracted attention, even on that tenth floor, and, darting back into our rooms, young Anderson and I decided that it was time for us to get out.

We packed our stuff, and a few minutes later called at the hotel office for our valuables. These were handed over to us with gratifying promptness. Then we hailed a taxi and sped for the address Hardy had left with us.

Though we could not see that anyone was following us, still there was much traffic in the streets, and we felt sure we were under constant observation. At Hardy's address we found a highly nervous old lady, who was very deaf. With much difficulty, and repeated shouting of the name "H A R D Y" we finally made her understand.

She led us to his rooms up the stairs. Hardy was not there, nor was there much of his belongings in evidence. The old lady left us and returned after a bit with a book. This she handed to me, making signs that it was from Hardy.

Thumbing it quickly through, I found what we were looking for. The message, folded and inserted between the pages of the book, was dated two days previously. It ran as follows:

*"My Dear Comrades: Castro, the half-breed, double-crossed us. His cut-throat crowd, I have just learned, are now waiting for me outside, and I am writing this note in the hope that you will follow me up and find it. You must at once leave Brazil. Castro has informed certain political hangers-on of the t r e a s u r e. These fellows have trumped up a charge against the three of us of having murdered de Silva. In five minutes I shall leave this room by the window in an attempt to escape. I have never yet waited for a Spaniard to come and get me. I like to go to him first.*

*"If you don't hear from me before Tuesday you may reasonably assume that I have been done in. The game is big and they'll go the limit. DO NOT TRUST ANYBODY, not even the local American consul. He probably is all right, but in this land of 'honest graft' the trail leads to high places, believe me. Get that boat for New York that leaves Wednesday at four in the afternoon. Good-bye and good luck!* *"HARDY."*

I heard a sob from Anderson as we finished reading the missive. That the indomitable Hardy had come to his end seemed incredible, and yet not only had Tuesday gone by with no word, but this was Wednesday, and less than three hours remained before the boat sailed, with our passage and berth arrangements still to be made.

Outside, our taxi, with its motor still running, waited for us, and if ever mortal men were in a dilemma Anderson and I were those individuals. Finally Anderson strode over to me, and, with a look in his eyes such as I had never before seen, he said:

"I can't go and leave Hardy without making some effort to help him."

I gripped his hand. What a relief! It seemed almost as if already we had rescued him—and yet there we were, two utter stangers in that great South American city, with a band of conscienceless rascals after us, backed by the power of the law!

We started down the stairs where we observed the old house-wife. She was reading a newspaper, which she now hurried to show us. And there, in a comparatively prominent place, was the news that Hardy had been killed in what was designated as a street brawl. Even our slight knowledge of Spanish made that short paragraph all too intelligible.

Into the taxi we hurried, with Anderson pinching my arm.

I regarded him in surprise.

"Different driver," he said, nodding to the man on the front seat.

I glanced sharply at the fellow, but could not say.

"Let's go on," I murmured, "and trust to luck."

"You bet you!" returned the young man. "But there won't be any luck about it. We'll try this."

When the chauffeur turned around for instructions he got them in forcible and understandable proportions. Anderson's revolver was within six inches of his back. The man went white.

"*A vapor!* The boat!" ordered Anderson.

The vigor of that driver's assent was comical. His head rocked and bobbed with eagerness.

"*Si! Si! Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed.

SEVERAL YEARS have passed since the occurrence of the foregoing events, and young Anderson since has married. In his nest of a home, to which I am a frequent bachelor visitor in good standing, there is prominently located a certain replica of a beautiful young female just budding into womanhood. It represents the best in the art of the Ataruipe and is regarded by the lady-of-the-house as perhaps just the least bit too naturalistic.

Among artists and archaeologists, however, it has inspired more controversy than anything else in the present century. The trend of opinion is that the figure is an extravagant but exceedingly clever bit of modern work which is being foisted on a gullible public, ever too quick to give credence to cock-and-bull stories of lost treasure such as Anderson and I relate.

They ask for the camera and photographs that Van Dusee had. We say that we did not miss them until on the boat bound for New York; that they were probably stolen from our rooms at the hotel in Rio de Janiero.

They ask us for sight of some of the marvelous jewels. We show them some of the smaller ones, but they tell us these are ordinary and may have been acquired any place; and at their insistence for a view of the big gems we are compelled to advise them that the package handed us by the clever hotel clerk was a duplicate of the one we gave him containing the select stones brought by us from the Caverns of the Ataruipe; that we learned that it contained common pebbles some time before the port officials at Rio de Janiero went through our effects, confiscating everything they could find and seeming particularly happy at discovering the package described so minutely in their search-warrant—the one the scoundrel hotel clerk made up in imitation of Bobby's wrapping, which we had been careful to restor to its original appearance after discovering the cheat.

"Yes, but how did you save this beautiful statue if they got everything else?" is the final thrust.

And here Anderson lapses into silence, for the matter is a delicate one. It involved thrusting the small package into the arms of a handsome young lady who stood in the throng that curiously watched us come aboard the ship at the last moment under the guardianship of numbers of Brazilian officials, who hovered over us with the eagerness of flies. As she caught Anderson's eye and got the idea that leaped from it, I am sure she giggled with delight at the ruse, for she was pure American.

Once a year each of us receives a communication from Rio de Janiero that purports to come from government officials. The letters are entirely preposterous in their content—they read like the notorious Spanish legacy letters so long the vogue of confidence men, and speak urgently, earnestly—yea, almost beseechingly—of untold wealth that awaits us if we will but come to Rio de Janiero and assist in the quest for the lost Caverns of the Ataruipe.

But we feel, young Anderson and I, that constant and continuous governmental search must be going forward for the immense treasure; and we feel, further, that in all fairness to the world at large that wonderful collection of art material should be restored to humanity; but we find it difficult indeed to see just why two Americans—even conceding that their help might be of value, which is doubtful—should assist a greedy and unjust officialdom that is absolutely guilty of the death of the best guide and friend it was ever the good fortune of either of us to have encountered.

*Another story by JULIAN KILMAN will appear in the next issue of WEIRD TALES. It is called "The Well," and it's a "creepy" yarn, warranted to give you "goose-flesh" thrills*

## Woman Receives Poems from Spirit World

SEATED in an Evanston drawing-room with some twenty other guests, Mrs. John H. Curran of St. Louis wrote quaint poetry by the yard, all of which, she claims, came from "Patience Worth," who dwells in the land of spirits. Mrs. Curran declares that she first made the acquaintance of "Patience Worth" in July, 1913, while seated with a friend at a ouija board. Suddenly the ouija wrote:

"Many moons ago I lived. Again I come. Patience Worth is my name."

Since then, says Mrs. Curran, Patience has dictated to her numerous poems, dramas and stories. Most of these are in archaic Anglo-Saxon.

"It is as though you spoke through a wall to a person every day," said Mrs. Curran in explaining the apparent phenomenon—"a person who would tell you his habits and customs. After several years of conversation, you would know as much about that person as if he were in the same room with you. So I feel about Patience Worth. I have never seen her, nor have I tried to picture her, but since she often talks in Anglo-Saxon I have concluded that she must have lived on the Scottish border about the time of the Stuarts. She has given me stories in the language of the Bible, of the Elizabethan age, the last century, and this.

"It is not Spiritualism, and I am not a medium. I am perfectly normal when I receive messages from the personality who calls herself Patience Worth. In fact, I can converse with others in the room while she dictates to me."

Then, to prove her point, Mrs. Curran rapidly recited a poem that she claimed was sent from the spirit world.

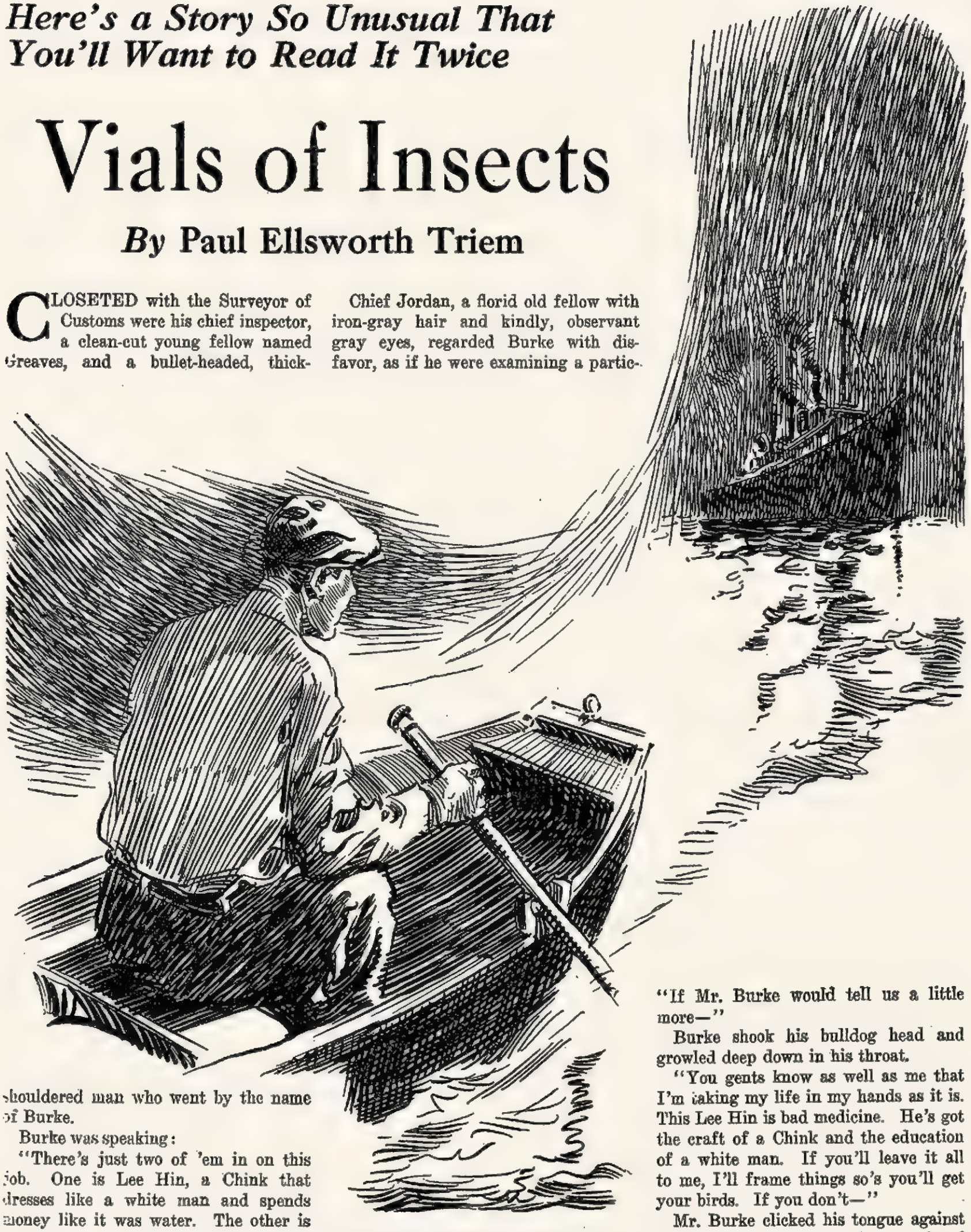
## Man Captures Lion, Barehanded

WHEN Stanley Graham of Chicago goes lion hunting he needs no weapons save his bare fists. Recently attacked by a mountain lion in a Mexican desert, he jerked off his coat, flung it around the beast's head and, after a terrific struggle, choked it into insensibility.

*Here's a Story So Unusual That You'll Want to Read It Twice*

# Vials of Insects

## *By* Paul Ellsworth Triem



CLOSETED with the Surveyor of Customs were his chief inspector, a clean-cut young fellow named Greaves, and a bullet-headed, thick-shouldered man who went by the name of Burke.

Burke was speaking:

"There's just two of 'em in on this job. One is Lee Hin, a Chink that dresses like a white man and spends money like it was water. The other is the man I got acquainted with and got the dope out of. His name is Ward—Jerry Ward. He's boatman and runner for Lee Hin. I've found out that they're intending to pull off a job in a day or two. We can make a cleaning on them—get them with the goods on!"

Chief Jordan, a florid old fellow with iron-gray hair and kindly, observant gray eyes, regarded Burke with disfavor, as if he were examining a particularly noxious variety of insect or reptile. He pursed his lips and looked deprecatingly at his assistant.

"What do you think, Charlie?" he asked.

"We haven't much to go on," Greaves replied, his voice also tinged with dislike.

"If Mr. Burke would tell us a little more—"

Burke shook his bulldog head and growled deep down in his throat.

"You gents know as well as me that I'm taking my life in my hands as it is. This Lee Hin is bad medicine. He's got the craft of a Chink and the education of a white man. If you'll leave it all to me, I'll frame things so's you'll get your birds. If you don't—"

Mr. Burke clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth with an air of finality. His furtive eyes were defiant, as if he perceived the disgust his presence created. Moreover, there had been a dogged restraint and circumspection in all that he said—carefully selecting his details, presenting some which would

serve his purpose, suppressing others which might incriminate him.

"All right." Jordan whirled his chair toward his flat-topped desk. "You keep in touch with Mr. Greaves here, and we'll work with you. Of course you're after the reward—"

Again Burke interrupted, doggedly, obstinately:

"Not altogether, Chief. I could have made more by setting in with Lee Hin. I'm an honest man, and I don't take to this kind of job. But of course I'll accept whatever money there is in it."

Charlie Greaves escorted Burke to the outer office and, with a feeling of relief, saw him depart.

"Well, Charlie, this is one end of the business that I call nasty," Chief Jordan said, as the inspector re-entered the inner office. "I'd give five dollars for a chance to kick that scoundrel all the way out of here and down into the street!"

"I'll raise you five: I'd give ten!" Greaves replied. "Of course, he's in on this thing, but he'll fix it so that we can't do a thing to him!"

Jordan nodded.

"Sure! And we've got to take up with even a cur like this, when he has anything definite to offer. All right—you keep tab on him and let me know if anything develops."

IN LEE HIN'S shack two lights were burning. One was in the front room, furnished with a square pine table (on which stood the first light) and two steel cots covered with drab army blankets.

The second light was in Lee Hin's study, at the back of the shack. On a high stool, before an enameled bench, which ran the entire length of this second room, sat Lee Hin himself. He was clad in white, from head to foot, and over his mouth and nose he wore a mask of padded cotton.

The part of his face that was visible outside of this mask was keen and animated. His dark eyes glowed, and there was a double furrow of concentration between them. He was stooping over a glass slide, on which he had just dabbed a drop of a milky culture from a test tube. He worked fast, adding a minute drop of stain, then dropped a cover glass into place and slipped the slide upon the revolving stand of his microscope.

This done, Lee Hin looked up at the young man standing at the other side of the room.

"Better not come too close, Jerry," the Chinaman warned, with a singularly tranquil and impersonal voice. "You know—there is death in the air of this room sometimes. I'm willing to risk my own life, but not the lives of my friends."

In spite of the impersonality of his voice, there was a subtle magnetism about the Oriental: a radiation of power, which marked him as a born leader of men. His eyes warmed with the mellow light of friendship as he raised them to Jerry Ward's face.

Jerry shuffled nearer the door, glancing suspiciously at the rows of culture tubes stacked in orderly ranks at the back of the enameled bench.

"I never can make out what the devil you want to tinker with them crazy little bugs for, Hin," he observed discontentedly. "If I had as much jack as you got—"

"Money is not all there is in life, Jerry," Lee Hin interrupted. "There is friendship—and service! I am doing this for my country. Her fisheries represent a tremendous source of wealth. The fungology and the bacteriology of fishes—it is an inexhaustible subject!"

He paused, glanced keenly at his companion, then abruptly changed the topic:

"I see you have not changed your clothing, my friend. I know only too well what that means. The *Shanghai* is due in this evening. Jerry, can't you see how this is going to end? Let me tell you something: that false friend of yours, Burke, is even now scheming to get the best of you. Do you know what is in his mind?"

Jerry shook his head, defiance and wonder in his eyes.

"I will tell you. He has fallen in love with Irene—with your girl. In his malignant pig brain, he is thinking how he can get you out of the way. I can feel it whenever he comes near—he radiates hatred like a pestilence!"

Jerry laughed uneasily.

"You're buggy, Hin," he replied. "Burke won't try to put no Indian sign on me—he daresn't. He'd pull himself in, if he shoved me!"

Lee Hin turned to his microscope.

"What is willed to be, will be," he observed sententiously. "No man can overcome his destiny."

Jerry tiptoed out of the room presently, much after the manner of an embarrassed gentleman with a hiccough trying to get quietly out of church. He felt ill at ease. There was something about Lee Hin—

He reflected, as he seated himself on the bench outside of the shack and stared out toward the open sea, that this Chinaman was a novel sort of employer. During the six months or better that Jerry had worked for him, pulling the oars in the skiff while Lee Hin fished with variously baited hooks at the end of his long, sea-green line, the Chinaman had never given him a curt word or an uncivil order. He had treated Jerry as an equal, discounting the white man's early dislike of Orientals and his later uneasy recognition of Lee Hin's intellectual superiority. From that first moment to the present, there had been an impersonal gentleness about the Chinaman that had reduced Jerry to a position of almost worshiping obedience.

Only on one matter had there been any disagreement between them: Lee Hin felt strongly on the subject of opium smuggling. He would not positively forbid the young fellow to mix in this illegal traffic, but he was gradually bending him to his way of thinking, as much by his silent will force as by his occasional incisive criticism.

NIGHT had fallen, and with it a fog shifted over the rocky shore and out upon the broad channel. Yellow lights flashed here and there, and the mournful voice of the fog signal kept up its doleful iteration.

Jerry shook himself and peered down toward the little cove. His skiff lay there on its side, well above the reach of the rising tide.

Through the mists there came a low, resonant, deep-throated whistle. Jerry stood up abruptly and entered the front room of the shack. From one corner he took a lantern with a strip of red bunting tied over the chimney. This he lighted and carried down to where the skiff lay. On the end of a six foot stake, with a forked end, Jerry hung the lantern. Then he took from his pocket an electric flashlight, snapped it a few times to be sure bulb and battery were in good condition, and finally returned the flashlight to his pocket and pulled the skiff down into the water.

Five minutes after he had pulled away from the shore, he would have been invisible to anyone standing at his point of departure. The skiff was painted a slate gray; and, save for the whitish blotch of the man's face in the darkness, there might have been nothing there but a partially submerged log floating out to sea.

The whistle came again, much nearer. Between the skiff and the shore the cough of a motor boat sounded. Jerry let his oars rest, with their dripping blades an inch above the water. The launch passed on, and he resumed his rowing.

The fog lifted. He could see it hanging over the distant city, a lurid, angry glow where the illumination of the streets struck against it.

Now the lights of the steamer showed in the darkness, high above the water, moving silently and majestically down upon the man floating there like a chip—

Jerry threw his weight against the oars. The steamer was almost upon him. He sent the boat back its own length, measured with one keen glance the distance he had allowed for clearance, and took from his pocket the flashlight. The *Shanghai* was opposite the spark of red that indicated the position of the lantern on the shore when Jerry flashed his signal—three short flashes and a longer one.

Next moment he had caught up his oars. From a port hole high above there shot a dark object which swooped down and struck the water with a smashing impact; two other bundles followed it.

The ship continued on its way, but at three points on the dark water a tiny glow showed where the cork-buoyed packages of smoking opium were floating. To each had been attached a small glass tube containing phosphorus, invisible at any great distance, but easily distinguished by the man in the boat.

Jerry pushed the skiff forward with sturdy breast strokes. He reached over the side for the first of the packages and hauled it in. Another stroke carried him within reach of the second bundle.

He was just about to seize it when a warning sound reached him—the cough of a gas engine. In a flash he remembered the launch which had passed seaward close to shore. They had taken advantage of the same darkness that had protected him.

A light blazed out—the search light of the revenue boat.

In that instant the young man thought of his mother, old, placid, credulous, to whom he had told fairy stories to account for the money he gave her so prodigally at times. And he saw the dark eyes and the oval face of a girl—his girl, Irene—and the face of Lee Hin, serene and impassive as if carved of ivory. It was Lee Hin who had warned him this very evening; and warned him of the business itself, and of Burke, Jerry's associate in it.

As if it had been a spectre, summoned by this racing thought, a face stood out of the darkness ahead: the red, threatening face of Burke, standing at the shoulder of another man in the prow of the launch.

"That's him!" Burke was saying, in his hoarse, growling voice. "Look out for the dope—"

Jerry gripped an oar and swung himself to his feet. He cast a burning look upon the informer.

"You dirty dog—"

The nose of the launch rose on the swell. As it came down it caught the forward end of the skiff under its sharp keel.

In the same instant there was the *crack* of a pistol, and Jerry pitched from his skiff into the water. Burke, the gun still quivering in his hand, stared over, searching the glistening surface of the tide.

"Take that gun away from him!" a voice from the rear of the launch commanded. "He had no business to shoot—"

"I did it in self-defense!" Burke growled. "In another moment he would have got me with that oar! Get a move on, you fellows! Grab that package! We've got to get ashore before Lee Hin makes his getaway!"

But when they came to the shack of Lee Hin, ten minutes later, the lights were out and the place was deserted.

The Chinaman was gone.

ON THE money he had saved from his profits in opium running Burke was able to travel north in first-class style. He sojourned for a time in Canada, then went east and visited New York.

He told himself he was through with dope. Every man's hand was against the drug-runner, while the vender of good moonshine or smuggled liquor was looked upon as a public benefactor. No more opium for him—he would become a bootlegger.

He stayed in New York ten days, and discovered that the business he had contemplated entering was organized like a trust or a shipping pool, and that to enter it he must have "real money." His little roll, which he had looked upon with considerable complacency, was reduced to microscopic size by comparison with the financial resources of these eastern operators.

Burke cut his New York visit short. Memories were stirring uneasily within him—the face of a dark-eyed girl, which flashed upon him sometimes out of the dusk, and the smell of fog blowing gustily down Market Street. There was nothing like that in the East. He went to Chicago.

In Chicago he stayed two days. He had purposed to remain at least a week, but on that second day a feeling, which had come to him before, returned with increased energy. It was what Burke called a "hunch."

"That little dame is thinking about me," he growled down in his burly throat. "She's forgetting that scut, and I'm going back! I got a hunch she'll treat me right, now that she's forgotten him!"

Three nights later Burke was standing on the upper deck of the Oakland ferry, looking with ferocious tenderness at the lights of his native city. The clock in the tower of the Ferry Building showed that it was still early; but a powdery fog was blowing down street, making it seem late.

Burke secured a room at a waterfront hotel. He scrubbed and groomed himself, anointed his hair with perfume, and presently sallied forth. He was going to test that hunch of his.

He journeyed to an outlying residential district. Down a side street he tramped stolidly. He turned a corner—and hesitated.

There, a few doors away, was the apartment house. He slipped along to the tradesmen's entrance and stepped into its sheltering gloom. He didn't feel exactly comfortable. He had pictured himself going boldly up to the door and ringing the bell. Now he decided to wait a while—to reconnoiter.

People came and went—elderly people; children; occasionally a girl whose half perceived figure brought him forward, tense and breathless. Then as he was starting toward the entrance of the apartment, the girl he was hoping yet fearing to see came down the street from the opposite direction, passed within five feet of him, and went into the house. She had not seen him, but he had seen her.

Burk realized that the impression of that pale, sorrowful face would be with him till he died.

He left his retreat a few minutes later and walked slowly away. He could feel the perspiration trickling down his forehead into his eyes. His heart pounded steadily at his ribs.

Burke decided, without thinking much about the matter, to walk the two miles back to his hotel. He struck off down a street lit with old-fashioned gas lamps, whose straw-colored flames gleamed green and witchlike in the eddying fog. He had steadied down to his habitual pace, and had no premonition to look behind him. If he had only had one of his hunches now. . . .

But he didn't. Perhaps it would have made little difference, in any case; for the lithe figure, which had detached itself from the shadows of a vacant lot across from the apartment house as Burke departed, blended easily with the gloom of the late evening.

He returned to his hotel, somewhat reassured by his walk. His blood tingled and he felt thoroughly alive. He even grinned to himself as he took his key

from the night clerk and went up to his room on the second floor. He had had a case of "nerves," that was all.

"Damned if I don't think I've got kind of out of the habit of breathing this fishy night air," he told himself, with heavy jocularity. "Well, something give me the creeps, for sure!"

He closed his window and latched it securely. He had already locked his door, and now he braced a chair under the knob. There was no transom—no other opening through which a breath of night air could come, except a rather wide crack beneath the door.

He ignored this.

FIFTEEN MINUTES after Burke had locked himself into his room, the figure of a young Chinaman might have been seen journeying up Clay Street.

The face of this Chinaman was not an ordinary one. The lips were thin and passionless. The eyes were inscrutable. There was something imposing—something of impersonal power—in the serene and almost pitying expression of that yellow, mask-like face.

The Chinaman wore a loose-fitting silk blouse and silk trousers, and thick-soled felt slippers and a black silk cap. His arms were crossed over his chest, and his hands were concealed in the wide sleeves. He walked with his head bowed, evidently in deep thought.

Instinctively, he followed his rather devious way until it brought him to a basement door, opening off from an obscure alley. Here he let himself in with a great brass key.

Once inside the room, he paused to shut and lock and finally to bar the door before turning on a light. It was a low-ceiled apartment of unusual extent, so that its farther walls were lost in obscurity. It was warm, almost steamy; and there was a pungent smell as of seaweed, and the salt wind from the ocean.

A bench with a white-enameled top was built against one wall. This bench was covered with racks for test tubes and culture bottles, and with bell-jars, reagents, stains, a compound microscope with a revolving stand and other apparatus of various sorts.

The newcomer crossed over to this bench and selected a wide-mouthed vial, into whose neck he fitted loosely a pledget of absorbent cotton. He placed the bottle on the bench, convenient to a high stool on which he evidently intended to seat himself.

Next he selected a surgeon's forceps with long, thin points, and, with this in his hand he crossed over to a keg placed on a wooden bench in a corner of the room. The light, though dim here, sufficed to enable him to peer down through the netting that covered the keg and to perceive a myriad of filmy creatures which clung to the under side of the netting.

Deftly he raised the netting at one side, thrust his hand, armed with the forceps, underneath, and clipped one of the captives by its black-veined wings. Replacing the netting, he crossed over to the bench and seated himself on the stool.

With the precision of one accustomed to the handling of minute objects, he selected from a rack in front of him a tube, plugged with cotton and partly filled with a milky, clouded fluid. Still holding the little creature he had taken from the keg by its captured wings, he removed the cotton stopper from this culture tube, dipped a tiny glass rod into the turbid fluid within, and applied the rod to the head of the captive. He then placed the latter in the wide-mouthed vial, replaced the cotton stopper, and returned to the miniature rain-barrel for a new specimen.

It was slow work, but the man at the bench performed every action with a machinelike regularity and an unrelaxing attention that showed the importance he attached to it. At the end of half an hour he had two dozen prisoners in the vial. He held them up toward the light and crooned gently to them:

"Little friends—little angels of justice! Justice? But how may I be sure—"

He laid the vial gently down and stood looking at it. His lips moved. Then his eyes lighted, and hastily he turned and selected another vial, the exact counterpart of the one he had filled with the "little friends."

Equipped with this second vial and the forceps, he returned to the keg and presently he had placed in it a score or so of untreated insects. He placed the two vials side by side, arranged the cotton which filled the necks so that it furnished no clew to the identity of the bottle containing the original captives, and finally he closed his eyes and shuffled the vials swiftly about.

When he had finished this queer juggling of the bottles, the Chinaman betook himself to a distant part of the basement, and from behind a piece of sriped ticking, hanging against the wall he took a bundle of clothing. Quickly divesting himself of the garb he wore, he changed into this new costume. It was a dilapidated suit, such as might have been worn by a Chinese laundryman in indigent circumstances.

Next he secured some newspapers, which he folded in such a way as to approximate the size of laundered shirts. He placed six of these dummy shirts on a sheet of wrapping paper, folded the latter neatly, and tied it. Returning with this package to the bench, he wrote the name "Burke" clumsily on it with a soft leaded pencil, and, after it, some Chinese characters.

All this time he had resolutely refrained from glancing at the two vials, but when the package was ready he moved backward along the bench, fumbling behind him till his slim hand encountered one of the bottles.

Without glancing at it, he placed it carefully in an inner pocket of his ragged blouse, tucked the bundle under his arm, crossed to the door, and turned off the light and went out.

THE NIGHT clerk of the Great Eastern Hotel, many of whose patrons were sea-faring men, was accustomed to seeing Chinese laundrymen delivering special orders of shirts and underwear at all hours of the day and night. He therefore glanced negligently over his shoulder when a meek voice hailed him from the counter:

"I say, Bossy Man—you sabe Captain Buck? Him come all same today?"

"Captain Burke? All right, John—you'll find him up in two-one-seven, street side, back of the hall. He's in his room now."

The Chinaman shuffled away, went padding up the stairs and down the long hall, and found the door of two-one-seven. Here he paused and considered. He must make no mistake.

He tried the door softly. It was locked, of course. Then he knocked and raised his voice, speaking English in a way that would have startled the night clerk:

"Is this Mr. Peter Fitzgerald's room?"

A rumbling growl ended in a curse.

"No, damn your silly eyes, it ain't! Get away from that door!"

The Chinaman muttered an apology and retreated audibly. Half way down the hall he stopped, took the vial from his pocket, and returned to two-one-seven.

Noiselessly he approached the door and knelt down. He removed the pledget of cotton from the neck of the bottle and by the light of the hall lamp gently blew each tiny insect under the door as it was shaken clear of its glass prison.

HALF an hour later, Lee Hin undressed and climbed into bed in the little chamber adjoining the basement laboratory.

Just before he snapped off the light, he took a pledget of cotton out of the neck of a wide-mouthed bottle and shook from the latter a score of so of buzzing insects.

"Little friends!" he said gently. "May the spirit of justice which rules all things—which holds the suns in their appointed orbits as they swing through infinite space, and which guides the destinies of the tiniest insect—may the God of all good men, of Moses and Confucius, decide—and strike through you!"

Then he turned out the light and went placidly to bed.

BURKE slept but poorly that first night after his return.

He was just dropping into a doze when some blundering fool knocked at his door by mistake; and after Burke recovered from the rage which this incident occasioned, a mosquito buzzed down out of the ceiling and bit him on the neck. He killed the insect with the first slap; but a few minutes later, just as he was again becoming drowsy, another bit him under the eye.

After that it seemed to him that the room was full of mosquitoes. He made up his mind that his nerves were playing him tricks. There *couldn't* be so many of the tormenting insects in one room! He had seen none during the evening. He must be imagining half of it—but there were the bites!

It was nearly three o'clock before he finally fell asleep. And he slept like a drugged man till late in the morning.

When he got up and looked at himself in the glass, he was furious to find his face disfigured by three great purple bites. There were at least a dozen others on his body, but those he didn't mind. He was thinking of the effect of these disfigurements on the girl, whom he had resolved to see tonight.

He killed half a dozen blood filled mosquitoes, perched heavily in the window, and tramped downstairs to berate the clerk.

The clerk listened to him with gathering wrath.

"Mosquitoes your grandmother!" he snarled. "We never have no mosquitoes in this house! I shouldn't wonder if you had the itch. You better find a room somewhere else!"

Burke looked ferociously at him, but the clerk returned the glare with interest. Not for nothing had he run a water-side hotel for ten years. He knew how to meet threat with threat. Burke went out and ate breakfast, for which he discovered he had little appetite.

He put in most of the day walking the streets, thinking of his grievances, and treating his mosquito bites. He bought a bottle of lotion from a druggist. The latter eyed the bites dubiously.

"Those mosquitoes must have been some snapping turtles, friend!" he commented. "They look more like tick bites. You'd better take something for your blood—some of this compound—"

Burke seized the lotion he had paid for and dashed from the store. His head ached. Plainly, everyone was mad—everyone but himself.

For a time, during the middle of the day, the mosquito bites seemed to be getting better; but Burke continued to apply the lotion, and to inspect himself in the glass.

He would be fairly presentable by night, at this rate.

It was about four o'clock when he became aware of a shooting pain radiating from the bite he had first received—the one on his neck. He jumped up and ran to the looking-glass. The thing had puffed up like a walnut, and had turned an angry purplish color.

Feverishly, Burke applied more lotion. He made a compress with a wet towel and wrapped it around his neck. Hardly had he accomplished this when he perceived that another of the bites was swelling and growing painful. Within an hour and a half, he had a dozen of these inflamed places.

Burke realized that he would have to put off his visit to the girl until next day. Probably the druggist was right—his blood was too thick. He must buy a bottle of that stuff—that compound. He had been drinking too much bootleg whisky.

He went to bed early. The thought of food nauseated him. He sank into a heavy slumber, from which he was aroused by a voice in the room.

It was a thick voice, repeating long, meaningless strings of words. Burke tried to sit up to listen, and the voice ceased. He was not able to raise himself, however. Something was wrong inside his head. . . .

It was some time later that Burke discovered that the flat, babbling voice was his own! It rose to a scream, then shifted into a screechy laugh. . . .

Strange faces were bending over him. There was a man with a pointed beard, who looked at him with pursed lips. This man was speaking:

"I never encountered a case of the kind before. I would call it anthrax, but for the number of the primary lesions. The interest is purely academic, of course. He'll be dead within twelve hours. Has he had any visitors? Any way you can find out if he has any relatives or friends?"

With a strange detachment, as if he were already a spirit, Burke listened. The night clerk was speaking:

"There has been no mail for him, and no visitors—except a Chinaman, who brought him a package of laundry. I guess he's a stranger—"

Burke's face became purple, and his body drew itself into a great knot. *A Chinaman to see him!* Laundry—he had had no laundry!

Suddenly he understood. Perception shone through him like a searchlight.

*A Chinaman never forgets! Lee Hin—*

He tried to shout the name. He must get his accusation into writing—

In the act of sitting up to demand paper and pen, he was caught up into a great darkness. He fell heavily back upon the bed.

"Syncope!" said the man with the pointed beard. "I must write up this case for the National Medical Journal."

LEE HIN, looking upon the last scene in the drama, meditated deeply.

"No man can escape his destiny," he mused.

The last shovel of dirt was thrown over the mound, and the man who threw it deftly patted it into place with the rounded back of his spade.

Lee Hin walked gravely away. He passed along a graveled path and approached a distant part of the cemetery. In the shade of a hawthorne he paused and stood gently regarding the figure of a girl, kneeling beside a grave.

"Poor little Irene!" he murmured.

And then he strode silently down the path and out at the cemetery gate.

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## Police Seize 800 Quarts of "Embalming Fluid"

**SUSPICIOUS of its peculiar odor, Chicago police confiscated 800 quarts of "embalming fluid," found on an undertaker's truck at the rear of 1400 South Central Park Avenue. Investigating, the police discovered that each of the 800 quart bottles bore the label, "Cedar Brook." Investigating further, they found that each bottle contained rye whisky. Three men were arrested with the undertaker's cargo. None could "remember" the name of the man to whom they were told to deliver the "embalming fluid."**

# The Secret Fear

*(Continued from page 22)*

warehouse to draw his revolver, motioning me to remain where I was.

"Stay here," he said under his breath. "I'll take a look. If it's a frame-up there's no need to get anyone else into it. Besides, you'd be more help here."

He squared his broad shoulders and was swallowed up by the oblong of black. It did not require much urging to persuade me to stay outside. Timidly I peeped through a crack in the warped boarding. The dim ray of light which Kenton cast before him seemed only to accentuate the obscurity.

The light became stationary. I could distinguish Kenton bending over something on the dirt floor not fifteen feet inside the entrance. He looked up and spoke softly.

"Come ahead, Mr. Bowers," he said. "No joke about this."

There was a grim edge to his tone. With a shiver, I stepped through the doorway and crossed to where he crouched above a motionless shape huddled against the side of the long loading platform.

The body was that of a man of large stature—more than six feet in height, as nearly as I could judge from the cramped position in which he lay. There were no visible marks of violence, except for a frayed linen collar pulled awry, which dangled by a single buttonhole from the shirt about the powerful, corded neck. But as I bent closer to look at the features, I drew back with a gasp.

The face of the dead man was distorted by an expression of the utmost horror and loathing. Around the dilated pupils of his large, bluish-gray eyes, the ghastly whites showed in a pallid rim of fear. His irregular, reddish features, even in death, seemed fairly to writhe with terror. One long, sinewy arm was thrown up across the lower part of his face, as if to ward off some unseen and terrible menace.

Shuddering, I stared across the body at Kenton's homely, impassive face.

"In heaven's name, what happened to him?" I asked.

Kenton's hands had been moving swiftly over the body. Now he spread them apart in a little puzzled gesture.

"There doesn't seem to be any wound," he said. "See if there isn't a switch around somewhere, Mr. Bowers. There ought to be a way of lighting up here."

I fumbled along the wall until my fingers encountered the round porcelain knob. A single grimy bulb, pendant from a cobwebbed rafter, threw a dim circle of grewsome yellow light upon the floor of the warehouse.

The body had lain on its left side, facing the doorway. Kenton methodically turned the corpse upon its face, his searching fingers exploring the back. To me, at least, it was a relief that the staring, terrified eyes were hidden from view, rather than gazing fearfully through the arch of the doorway into the narrow, empty street beyond.

"There's something queer about this," said Kenton. "No wound at all, Mr. Bowers, that I can find. No blood—not even a bruise, only this mark at the throat."

I had not seen the mark before, and even now I had to look closely to find it. It was scarcely more than a discoloration of the skin in a broad band beneath the chin. But there was no abrasion, much less a wound sufficient to cause the death of a powerful man like the one who lay before us.

With a shrug of his shoulders, Kenton rolled the body back to its original position. At once the ghastly eyes renewed their unwinking stare at the empty street.

A SOUND from the doorway caused us both to turn. Only Kenton himself can say what his imagination pictured there. For my part, I owned a feeling of distinct relief at sight of nothing more startling than a pair of ragged-looking men peering in at the open door.

As we looked, a third derelict of the wharves joined them, pressing inquisitively forward toward the body on the floor.

"Whassa trouble here?" asked one, curiously. "Somebody croak a guy?"

"Yes," said Kenton tersely. "Know him, any of you?"

His companion, who had been staring at the body, suddenly spoke in a startled tone:

"By gorry, it's Terence McFadden! I'd never have known the boy with that look on his face, except for the scar over his right eye. Look, Jim! Sure, and he looks as if the divil was after him!"

A confirmatory murmur came from the others. The grind of a street car's wheels on the curve of Washington Avenue cut clearly across the low lapping of the waves against the rotting piles outside the warehouse. The humid air, impregnated with the foul odors of the waterfront, was stifling.

The three men huddled closer, with fearful glances over their shoulders, as if striving to glimpse that which the eyes of the dead man watched. Kenton alone seemed unaffected by the tension.

"Know where he lives?"

"Over on Twenty-fourth Street," volunteered the third man. "But he'd been on the Tiger yonder this evening. I saw him go aboard. Why not call Captain Dolan? Him and Terry was pals."

"What's his name?"

"Dolan—Captain Ira Dolan."

"Go and get him," ordered Kenton, removing his cap and mopping his forehead.

The man, not unwillingly, passed out of the circle of light. We heard his footsteps on the planking of the pier, and his hail to the ship anchored there.

Kenton turned to me, a worried look on his face.

"Would you mind going down to Patton's place on the corner and 'phoning in, Mr. Bowers?" he asked. "I wouldn't ask it, but the captain knows you well. Tell him I'm staying with the body. And ask him to have Doctor Potts come, if he's there. I'd like to get to the bottom of this."

I was only too glad to get out of the warehouse, for the eerie atmosphere was beginning to get on my nerves. When I returned, two of the somnolent loafers from Patton's greasy lunch room, roused by my telephone message to Captain Watters of the fourth princent, followed in my wake, muttering and rubbing their bleared eyes.

Less than ten minutes had passed since we had found the dead man in Kellogg's old warehouse. Yet now a dozen frowsy wharf-rats fringed the doorway, brought thither by some mysterious telepathic message borne on the murky night air.

"Be here in ten minutes," I said, nodding to Kenton.

Suddenly a man made his way through the crowd and hastened toward us. His rugged, weather-beaten face took deeper lines from the dim light overhead, its high lights gleaming in the ghastly radiance like pieces of yellowed parchment. Yet there was power in the piercing blue eye, and strength in every line of the tall, gaunt figure, now stooping suddenly over the body of the dead man.

"Terence!" he cried, his voice harsh with grief. "Terence, lad!"

Kenton bent over and touched him on the shoulder.

"Are you Captain Dolan?" he asked.

The old man looked up, one hand still resting upon the motionless body beside which he knelt.

"I am," he said simply.

"I understand this man—Terence McFadden, his name is?—"

Captain Dolan nodded.

"I understand he was on board your ship tonight?"

"Yes," said Captain Dolan, rising to his feet.

"What time did he leave?"

"'Twas not more than half an hour ago, officer. Shortly after midnight, I would say. He was just aboard for a little farewell banquet, y'understand—just a friendly visit, eating and drinking and the like, before I leave at daybreak for another trip. I'm going down the coast."

Kenton shook his head.

"Never mind that. Have you any idea how he met his death? Had he any enemies that you know?"

Captain Dolan ran his bony fingers through his grizzled locks, his eyes still on the body of his friend.

"Enemies he had aplenty, officer, like any two-fisted man with the disposition of Terence McFadden. 'Twas only last week he cleaned up two of the Jerry Kramer gang that tried to hold him up with a pistol down on this very street. But his worry tonight had nothing to do with them. A man like Terence could take care of himself against any man. Truth to tell, he was his own worst enemy."

Kenton broke in sharply.

"What's that? He was worried tonight, you say?"

There seemed to be a trace of evasion in Captain Dolan's manner.

"It was a piece he read in the paper. It fair spoiled his supper for him."

"What was it about?"

"It was an item from the Zoo," replied Captain Dolan.

Kenton fingered a button puzzledly, casting a mystified glance at me. It was evident that his inquiries were not getting him anywhere.

Before he could question Captain Dolan further, the group about the doorway behind us was thrust roughly aside, and Patrolman Corcoran, the new officer from the adjacent beat, shouldered his way in. His right hand was twisted in the lapels of a short, squat foreigner with a swarthy face half hidden by a coarse, reddish-brown beard. The neck of his sweat-soaked undershirt was open, and his sleeves were rolled above hairy, muscular forearms.

Corcoran stared at the group about the lifeless body of Terence McFadden.

"So it's true, is it?" he curiously asked. "I thought 'Big Jim' here was trying to give me a wrong steer."

"Who?" asked Kenton.

"Dobrowski, or some such name—'Big Jim,' they call him. He's one of the Kramer gang, they say."

"Where'd you get him?"

"Caught him coming out of a basement over on Efton Street. He took one look at me and ran like hell. So I rounded him up and asked him what was the big idea of running. He just looked dumb, but I knew he'd been up to something. So I frisked him, and found—these!"

He pulled a watch and purse from the side pocket of his coat. Captain Dolan leaned forward eagerly.

"Terence's!" he cried. "See if his initials are not in the back!"

He fairly snatched the watch from Corcoran's hand. The younger patrolman turned to Kenton.

"Who's the old bird, anyway?" he asked in an undertone.

Kenton established the captain's connection with the affair in a few words. In the meantime the old man had pried open the gold case with his heavy thumbnail and was squinting inside.

"See!" he affirmed, pointing to the initials "*T. J. M.*" engraved there.

Corcoran nodded carelessly.

"'Big Jim,' all right," he said decisively. "He's the man that killed McFadden here."

"Big Jim" stared at his captor, chewing vigorously.

"No kill!" he exclaimed. "No kill!"

Kenton had been frowning perplexedly. Now he turned to Corcoran.

"Say, Bill," he demanded, "how did you get over here, anyhow? Who told you there'd been a man killed?"

To our utter amazement, Corcoran jerked his thumb toward "Big Jim."

"He did," he said.

"*He* did?" repeated Kenton incredulously. "Then you were the one that 'phoned in to the sergeant?"

Corcoran nodded, taking a tighter grip on the captive's lapels.

"I was going to call the wagon and go straight in with 'Big Jim' here. Then he told such a funny story that I thought maybe he was trying to string me, so I marched him over here to make sure."

Kenton shook his head.

"That was no way to do," he muttered under his breath. "Well, no matter. What does he say?"

"Says he took this stuff away from McFadden, but didn't kill him," sneered Corcoran. "Doesn't know who killed him, but he didn't. Fishy? Well, I'll tell the world!"

Captain Dolan again bent over the body of Terence McFadden. Then he looked up at "Big Jim."

"Tell us what happened," he commanded.

Words popped turbulently from "Big Jim." Either he was actually telling the truth, or he had committed his story to heart.

"No kill!" he vociferated, gesticulating. "No kill! Take watch, but no kill! Hide for man—pull him in—fight—he dead! Take money—run—hide—"

Fear shone in his shifting eyes and on his swarthy, perspiring face. As he glanced nervously about the building, the fantastic idea occurred to me that his fear was less of the police than of some unseen, intangible force beyond his comprehension. I caught myself looking apprehensively over my own shoulder.

Corcoran spat on the floor disgustedly.

"Part of that yarn's all right," he said. "That part about his stealing the watch and all, I mean. The rest is all bull. How would he get the stuff off a big guy like that without croaking him? How did he kill him, anyway?"

Captain Dolan leaned forward, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes, officer," he repeated. "How did he kill him? Tell us that if you can."

Corcoran thrust his captive toward Kenton and knelt beside the body. When he looked up, his face was blank. Rising he turned savagely on "Big Jim."

"Come, now!" he ordered roughly, shaking the foreigner by the shoulder. "How did you kill him? Speak up!"

"No kill!" repeated "Big Jim" stubbornly. "No kill!"

Corcoran raised his club menacingly. Whether he would have struck "Big Jim," or merely wished to intimidate him, I do not know; he had not been long on the force, and he felt his authority keenly. But Captain Dolan stepped forward, holding out an imperative hand.

"One moment, officer!" he said sternly.

FOR A breathless instant the tableau held. Then Corcoran, closing his amazed mouth, thrust his flushed face close to Captain Dolan's.

"What business have you got butting in on this, anyway?" he shouted. "Who told you to give orders? You seem to have been a friend of this fellow's, by what Tom here says. But how do we know you didn't have a grudge against him and doped him tonight aboard your boat? How do we know you didn't give him wood alcohol or something to drink that put him down and out? You'd better just keep quiet and stick around here till the doc takes a look at him."

Captain Dolan's wrinkled, parchment-like face turned an angry red, and his bony hands clenched. Then, suddenly, he relaxed, uttering a short, mirthless laugh.

"In remaining here, as you request," he replied, " 'tis my idea to see justice done. Little love as Terence had for Jerry Kramer and his gang, he would wish fair play, even for 'Big Jim' there. And for that reason I'll be asking your kind indulgence while I tell you a little of Terence McFadden."

Corcoran glared at the old man. Kenton shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead," he said. "We've got to wait for the car."

Captain Dolan stood erect beneath the grimy electric bulb, which cast a brassy gleam upon his grizzled locks. At his left stood Corcoran, scowling, one hand gripping his subdued prisoner. Beyond him Kenton leaned against the loading platform. I watched them from the shadows.

"Every man of us has his secret fear," began Captain Dolan abruptly, and a trifle oratorically. "With one it's the open sea. With another it's a horror of great heights. But we all have it. As for Terence McFadden, it took no more than a little, long-tailed, hand-organ monkey to set him a-shivering.

"And they seemed to know it, too, the grinning devils. No sooner would he pass a Dago organ-grinder on the corner than the little red-capped ape would let out a chatter and make a rush for Terence. And would you believe me, the man would actually turn pale.

" 'Come away, Ira,' he'd say, clutching at me, 'come away, Ira. Sure, and he'll be looking for a bite from the leg of ye.'

"I mind me of a day when we went to the Zoo, Terence and I. ' 'Tis understood,' says he, when we reached the gates, 'that we make no visit to the monkey house.'

"But I give him the laugh, with hints about his courage, d'ye mind, till at last he sets his teeth determined-like.

" 'No man shall say Terence McFadden is a coward,' says he. 'Let us go in.'

"The minute we enter the room, the place is in an uproar. The little yellow-haired monkeys are hanging by their tails and chattering, and even the big apes down in the corner are roaring like devils let loose. 'Tis no use for me to point out to Terence that the hour for feeding is at hand. He will have none of it.

" 'The beasts know me,' he mutters between chattering teeth. ' 'Tis my blood they would be having.'

" 'For why would they be having your blood?' I asks.

" 'I know not the why of it,' says he, shaking in every limb, 'but 'tis so.'

" 'Rubbish!' says I, for I wished to rid him of this foolish fear of his. 'Walk with me to this cage, and look the big chap in the eye. There's no harm he can be doing to you, and him safe behind the bars!'

"Terence was fair sweating with fear, but he grits his teeth, and arm in arm we walk over to the cage. The big tawny fellow—the ugly-faced one by the far door—sits there humped up in his corner, glowering at us with eyes like coals.

" 'Look, man,' says I, 'and give over your foolishness. Why, even in the open ye'd be a match for him.'

"No sooner are the words out of my mouth than the beast makes one jump from his corner and lands half way up the bars at the front of the cage, with a roar that would blast the very soul of ye. I own I was startled, little as I fear monkeys and their likes.

"But poor Terence gives a sort of gasp and leans against me, actually paralyzed with fear. His eyes are set in a glassy stare, like a dead man's. And I swear to you that after I got him outside, it was half an hour before the color came back to his cheeks and his knees gave over their quivering.

" 'Did ye see the horrible face of him?' he gasps. 'And the long arms reachin' for me throat?'

"And then he'd fall to trembling again."

CAPTAIN DOLAN paused as abruptly as he had begun. So vividly had he told his story that he had been for the moment transported bodily to the monkey house at the Zoo. Now, in the sudden silence, we moved uneasily, glancing at one another.

Corcoran scratched his head in a puzzled manner.

"What's all this got to do with finding the murderer?" he burst out.

Captain Dolan shook his head.

"There is no murderer," he said.

We all looked startled, I imagine. Kenton would have spoken, but Captain Dolan motioned him to silence. Even Corcoran, for once, found himself without words.

"I spoke of an item in the paper tonight," continued Captain Dolan. "Doubtless 'twas seen by all of you. Did you not read that one of the gorillas at the Zoo had escaped from its cage and was at large in the city?"

In the breathless silence which ensued I felt a peculiar thrill of terror pass up my spine. Kenton was fingering the holster of his revolver with nervous, clumsy motions. In some uncanny manner the gaunt old sea-captain's grim words of doubtful import had woven about us all a web of superstitious fear in which we vainly struggled, unable to grasp the saving clew.

" 'Twas that item which spoiled his supper for Terence, when he read it aboard the ship tonight. And no use I found it to reason with him. To his mind the grinning face of the big ape was peeping in at every porthole!"

Suddenly Corcoran whirled, peering into the blackness at the far end of the warehouse, where something stirred softly. Kenton drew his pistol. I felt the goose-flesh rising along my arms. Only the dead man, undisturbed, stared unwinkingly in the opposite direction.

The next moment a stray cat wandered leisurely into the circle of light and sat herself down to wash her dusty fur, blinking complacently up at our pallid faces. I wiped the cold drops from my forehead and breathed a deep sigh.

Corcoran turned almost pleadingly to Captain Dolan.

"The gorilla—" he said. "Was it the gorilla from the Zoo that killed Terence McFadden?"

Captain Dolan shook his head.

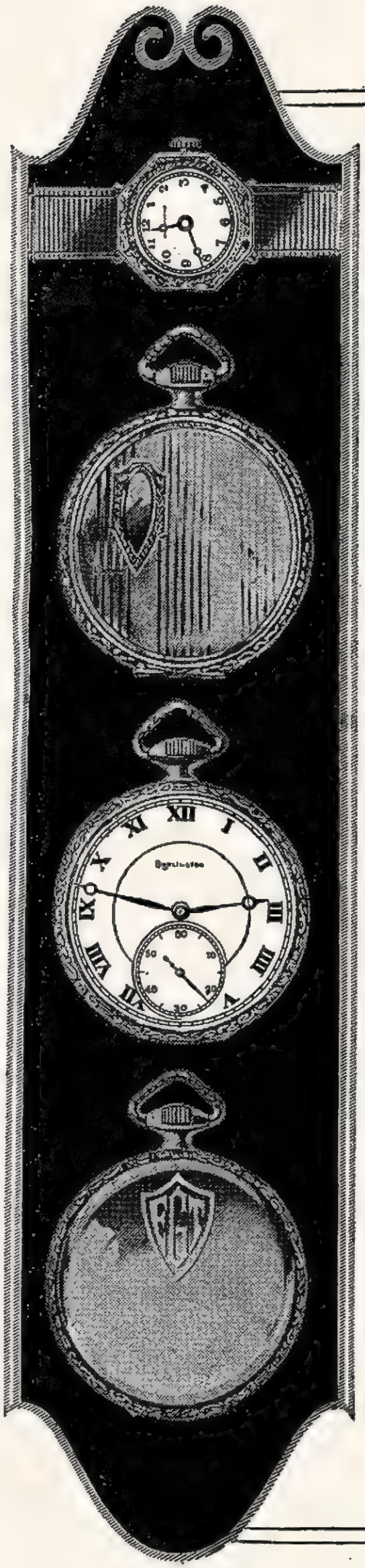
"I would not say that," he answered.

I stared at the parchment-like face in amazement. Like Corcoran, I had jumped to this conclusion. Kenton drew his hand across his forehead in perplexity.

"But you said there was no murder!" cried Corcoran. "Was it 'Big Jim' that killed him, after all?"

"I would not say that," repeated Captain Dolan.

*(Continued on page 48)*



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# The Secret Fear

*(Continued from page 46)*

Corcoran looked at the old man dazedly. Then he spoke very softly and soothingly, as one might interrogate a backward child:

"Then tell me, Captain Dolan," he said. "How did Terence McFadden die?"

"He was murdered," replied Captain Dolan.

Corcoran stared.

"Murdered? But you said there was no murderer!"

"Nor was there," said the captain.

Corcoran dropped his hands helplessly. Kenton took up the interrogation.

"Did he kill himself?" he demanded. "Was it suicide?"

"I would not say that," repeated Captain Dolan for the third time.

But Kenton was not to be baffled.

"With what weapon was the man killed?" he asked doggedly.

Captain Dolan gazed at the contorted face of the man at his feet.

"With one of the oldest weapons in the world," he answered. "A weapon which has caused the death of many a brave man—aye, braver and more powerful than Terence here."

The waves lapped saltily against the rotting piles at the far end of the warehouse. In the darkness a rat squeaked, and the cat, interrupting its toilet, darted out of the circle of light and vanished. In the darkness was heard the sound of a speeding motor.

Captain Dolan raised his eyes from the corpse of his friend, and his voice was very soft and compassionate:

"Did I not say that Terence was his own worst enemy? Had it not been for that foolish bewitchment of his—"

He turned and pointed suddenly toward "Big Jim," standing stupidly there in the shadows. It seemed almost that the eyes of the dead man, following the direction of his extended arm, were staring at the bestial, repulsive features of the prisoner with sentient terror.

"Look at the hairy arms of him!" he cried. "Look at the long, shaggy beard! When he stood on the platform yonder by the door and crooked his elbow about the throat of Terence, do you think the poor lad knew of the pistol stuck in his back, or the words of warning jabbered in some haythin lingo? To the mind of Terence 'twas nothing less than the coming true of all his nightmares! Small wonder that his eyes are bursting from their sockets as he lies there with the grip of terror stopping the valves of his heart and curdling the very blood in his veins!"

"Then the name of the weapon—"

"It is called Fear," said Captain Dolan.

The throbbing motor sounded at the end of the street. With a *squeal* of brakes, the police car halted outside. Doctor Potts pushed through the crowd and bent briefly over the body.

"Heart failure," he said.

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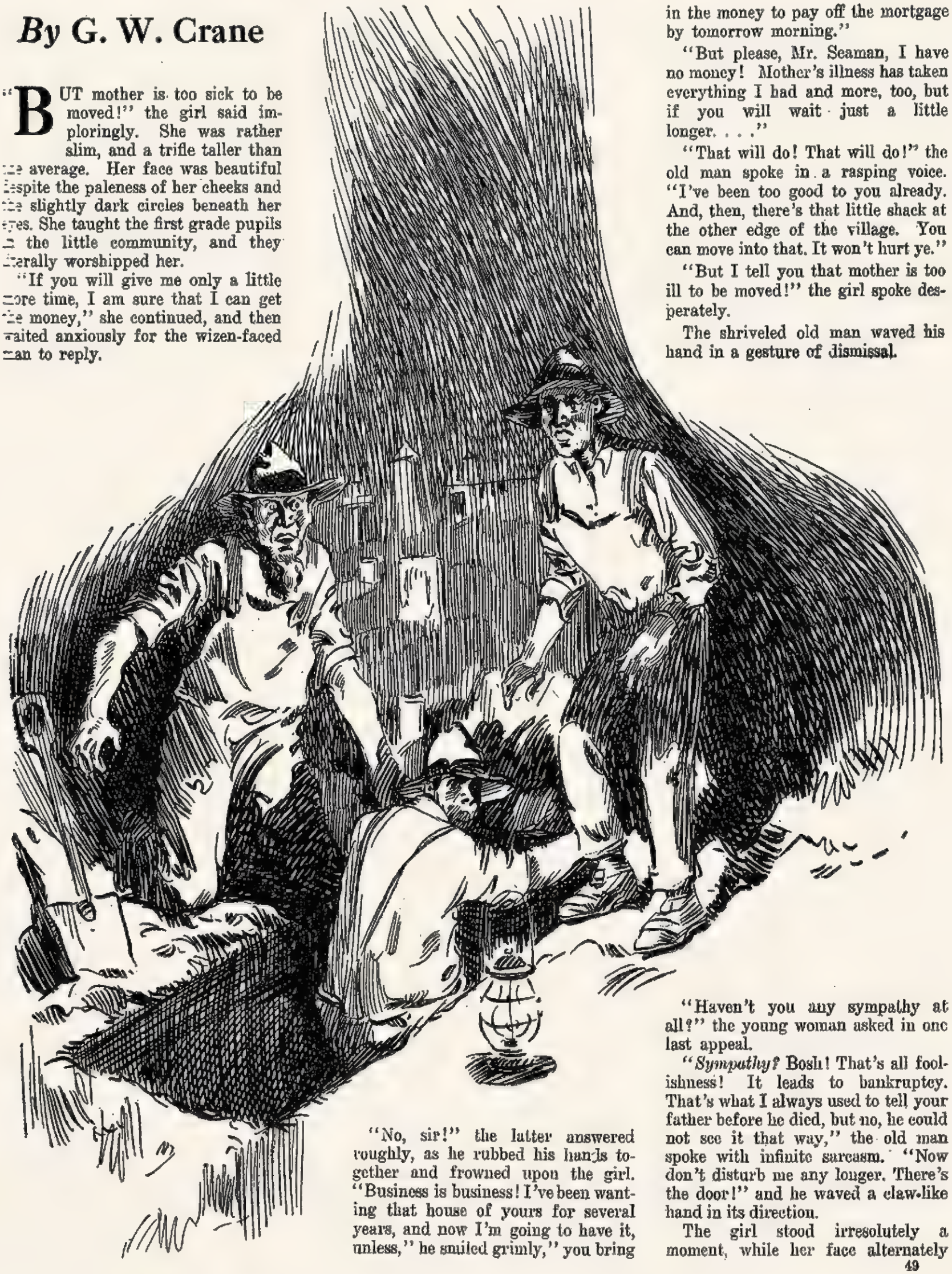
# AN EYE FOR AN EYE

## *By* G. W. Crane

"BUT mother is too sick to be moved!" the girl said imploringly. She was rather slim, and a trifle taller than the average. Her face was beautiful despite the paleness of her cheeks and the slightly dark circles beneath her eyes. She taught the first grade pupils in the little community, and they literally worshipped her.

"If you will give me only a little more time, I am sure that I can get the money," she continued, and then waited anxiously for the wizen-faced man to reply.



"No, sir!" the latter answered roughly, as he rubbed his hands together and frowned upon the girl. "Business is business! I've been wanting that house of yours for several years, and now I'm going to have it, unless," he smiled grimly," you bring in the money to pay off the mortgage by tomorrow morning."

"But please, Mr. Seaman, I have no money! Mother's illness has taken everything I had and more, too, but if you will wait just a little longer. . . ."

"That will do! That will do!" the old man spoke in a rasping voice. "I've been too good to you already. And, then, there's that little shack at the other edge of the village. You can move into that. It won't hurt ye."

"But I tell you that mother is too ill to be moved!" the girl spoke desperately.

The shriveled old man waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal.

"Haven't you any sympathy at all?" the young woman asked in one last appeal.

"*Sympathy?* Bosh! That's all foolishness! It leads to bankruptcy. That's what I always used to tell your father before he died, but no, he could not see it that way," the old man spoke with infinite sarcasm. "Now don't disturb me any longer. There's the door!" and he waved a claw-like hand in its direction.

The girl stood irresolutely a moment, while her face alternately

flushed and then grew pale. She felt once as if she could murder the heartless old skinflint as he sat at his desk. There was no way to get the money, and she perceived that she was absolutely in the hands of this merciless creature. With rage and despair consuming her spirit, she left the room.

The next day the girl and her invalid mother were forced to leave their cozy little home, and move into the damp, decaying house at the other end of the village. Neighbors insisted that the sick woman come into their homes, but even in her illness the invalid was too proud to do so.

Two weeks later the suffering of the poor woman was at an end. Out in the cemetery a haggard girl watched the lumpy, half-frozen clods of earth fall down upon the casket and shut in forever the body of her loved one. She did not leave with most of her neighbors who had attended the funeral, but stood silent, watching the swiftly filling hole.

Her eyes were dry. There were no tears left to soothe her. She had wept at the words of the minister, but now she had ceased. A fierce bitterness filled her heart.

When the mound had been finished, the pastor gently touched her arm, intending to lead her back to the carriage. But the girl fiercely shook off the friendly hand.

"Leave me alone!" she said.

"But it is damp and cold, and I want you to ride back home. All the other vehicles have gone."

"I can walk," she answered shortly.

The minister regarded her a moment and decided that it might be best to let her remain. He began to retrace his steps toward his conveyance. Reaching a bend in the road, he looked back, but the solitary figure was still standing motionless.

By most of the villagers Mr. Seaman was considered to be the stingiest, most tight-fisted old skinflint that ever lived. The older he became, the more his mercilessness seemed to increase. Even the dogs—when they saw him coming down the street—got out of his way.

The old man lived in a small ramshackle cottage at the edge of the village, and no one ever visited him there. He had a little office above the local bank, and it was in this that his callers found him when they wished to adjust money matters.

For several weeks the old man had been feeling a peculiar numbness all along his right side. At first he paid scarcely any heed to it, but it did not go away. As a result, he began to pinch his right leg every morning to see whether he was any better. He could notice no improvement, and as time passed, he believed that he was getting worse.

"I suppose it's just because I'm gettin' older'n I used to be," he thought, but this did not comfort him at all.

As a consequence, he determined to consult the town's physician, and although he regretted wasting his money in this manner, he went up to see Dr. Jackson.

The physician told him that it acted very much like paralysis, and that a complete numbness of his whole body might result. Although this might be gradual, he said, it could occur at a sudden stroke.

The doctor did not try especially to allay the old man's fears, for he shared the popular feeling toward the miser, and he saw that he was very susceptible to suggestion.

Sherman came away very much frightened. He did not appear to fear death itself, strange as this would seem. Perhaps it never occurred to him that his paralysis might be fatal. What really terrified him, however, was the idea that he might be rendered incapable of making either movement or sound, and that then he would be buried alive. This thought of being locked up in a coffin while he was not actually dead, haunted him day and night.

In his sleep he would dream of being locked within a casket, unable to utter a word, yet comprehending all that went on around him. He could hear the dirt fall shovelful after shovelful upon the box in which he was imprisoned. He could feel the air becoming oppressive.

Then he would swing his arms sideways, only to find himself shut in. He would kick, and endeavor to lift the lid, but six feet of damp earth would be crushing it down against his feeble efforts. He would beat frantically upon the encircling boards, but the hard-packed earth would muffle the sound. He could feel the pitch-blackness of his stifling tomb.

He could not see. He had used up almost all the air within his narrow coffin. He could imagine the grave-diggers walking around complacently several feet above him. If he could only make them hear! He was smothering—buried alive!

With a scream of horror he would waken, and lay panting, as he tried to recover from his nightmare. But he could not entirely push these dreams away, for he knew that there might be some truth in them. He had already seen an article in a magazine telling of just such a case. He decided that he must find the article again.

Searching for several hours through the pile of magazines which he kept stacked within one of his small rooms, he at length came upon the story which he had been seeking. Although it frightened him, he could not help reading it again.

He learned that for some reason the buried man had been dug up a few weeks after his interment, and when the casket had been opened, the dead man was found lying on his stomach with one hand clutching his scalp, from which most of the hair had been torn off.

Fascinated by the horror of the tale, he found himself reading it again. He could not help himself. For the remainder of the night he would lie thinking of the possibility that he himself might be buried alive.

In the daytime he was obsessed with this same thought. Even while he walked down the street to his office—and he found it more difficult to do so each day—he could clearly imagine himself so paralyzed that the neighbors might take him to be dead. Mentally he could see them gathering around his bedside. He could feel them lift him into the casket. He could feel himself driven to the cemetery, and lowered into the cold ground, all the while powerless to cry out or show in any way that he still lived. This idea almost smothered him, even while he was wide awake.

He grew haggard because of his fear, and would go about the town muttering to himself, and occasionally flinging out his arms, as if to push off something that seemed to be enveloping him. People thought that he was going crazy, and, indeed, his actions tended further to substantiate their judgment, for he grew more queer from day to day.

At last he went back to see Dr. Jackson, and confided his fears to him. The latter only laughed, and told him not to worry for the townspeople would not bury him before he was entirely dead.

"Anyway," the Doctor added, "the embalming fluid will kill you if you aren't dead already."

"No! *No! No!*" screamed the terrified old man. "I won't be embalmed! I won't be embalmed!" and his voice rose more shrilly at each repetition. "Promise me that you won't let them embalm me!" he demanded, and his eyes shone wildly.

The Doctor began to place credence in the reports of the town's gossips concerning the old man's madness.

"But every one's embalmed nowadays," he explained.

"But I don't want to be!" the miser said fiercely, as he began to shudder. "I might not be dead for sure, and if I were not embalmed, then I could come to life again."

The Doctor finally promised that he would not permit the poisonous chemicals to be placed within the old man's veins, in case the latter should die.

"Now there is something else I want you to promise me," the miser

went on. "I have been dreaming that I shall be buried alive. Oh, but I have," he added, as the Doctor began to shake his head. "If I were buried in the usual manner and should wake up. . . ," here he trembled, and a look of horror spread over his face. "But I won't be buried that way!" he yelled in a frenzy. "Promise me that you will do as, I say," he exclaimed in a tone that expressed a mixture of both command and entreaty.

"Well, what is it?" the Doctor asked curiously.

"I'm going to have a bell placed near my grave with a rope leading down into my coffin, and then, if I revive, I shall pull the cord, and ring the bell."

"But who would hear it?' Dr. Jackson asked, as he vainly strove to check a smile.

"Oh, there is a farm house not far from the cemetery, and somebody there could hear it, and come and dig me up."

"You'd smother before they could ever get to you," the Doctor objected.

"No! No! I have everything planned, and I have it written down so that you can do it just as I wish. I'll pay you now for your trouble," and he handed the Doctor a fifty-dollar bill. "Promise me that you will do it," he pleaded.

Dr. Jackson, thinking it all to be nonsense, nevertheless promised, and the miser slowly hobbled off.

The Doctor thought it all a good joke, and the news soon spread about the village.

"And to think," the Doctor said to a group of men standing in front of the little drug store, "the old tightwad gave me this fifty to see that his fool notions were carried out," and he showed them the bill.

The old man was the object of a great many jokes during the ensuing weeks, but he himself was feeling much more at ease to think that the Doctor had pledged himself to carry out his wishes.

The miser's right leg, however, was growing more and more numb. Each morning he would pinch it to see if there were any feeling left. It became very difficult for him to walk; so he decided to supervise, personally, the erection of the bell.

It was a large iron one much like the ordinary farmhouse dinner bell which the rural housewife uses to notify the men in the field that dinner is ready. The old man had it fastened on a post, which was set in the ground near the spot which he had chosen for his grave.

The time finally came when the shriveled figure of the miser did not appear upon the street, and investigation revealed him lying upon his bed, almost wholly paralyzed. Doctor Jackson obtained one of the middle-aged women of the village to wait upon him, and give him his food, for he could not even move his arms to feed himself. For a few weeks more he lay in this helpless condition gradually becoming more and more dependent upon his nurse. One morning he failed to open his eyes, and lay motionless, giving no sign of life whatever. Dr. Jackson had a great number of calls to make that day, and so it was not until late in the evening that he could attend the old fellow. Tired out from his labors, the doctor made a hasty examination, and said there was no doubt about his being dead.

Next day the Doctor gave the miser's written instructions to his man-of-all-work, and told him to see that they were fulfilled. The latter had a hole bored in the lid of the coffin, through which the rope was to pass. One end of it was placed in the hand of the corpse, and the remainder of the rope was pushed through a one-inch pipe, and fastened to the bell. The pipe permitted the rope to be pulled easily; otherwise the earth would have checked it. According to the miser's orders, another tube connected the cheap casket with the open air. This was to permit him to breathe if he should not be entirely dead.

The earth was rapidly shoveled into the opening, and in a short time a mound of yellow clay marked the old skinflint's last abode. It was unlike other newly-made graves, however, for a rope reached out of it to the bell near by, and six inches of an air-pipe protruded.

The grave-diggers left the spot, and returned to their homes. The cemetery was deserted unless one believes that the spirits of the dead hover above the last resting place of their bodies.

About three o'clock next morning the sleepy telephone operator in the little office above the drug store received a call.

"Hello! Hello!" a frightened woman's voice exclaimed. "This is Harding's. Say, that bell over in the cemetery has been ringing for ten minutes! It's getting louder and louder! Call the constable or somebody quick! There ain't any men folks at our place now, and we're scared to death!"

The operator was wide awake, for everybody knew the story of the burial of the old miser. She called the Doctor, but could get no response. In desperation she called the grave-diggers, and two others to go out to the ghostly spot. As soon as she had sent them on their weird quest, she called the Harding farmhouse.

"That bell quit ringin' several minutes ago!" Mrs. Harding replied. "I don't know what to think!"

The four men reached the dark cemetery with its eery tombstones faintly visible all about them. Hurriedly, and with conflicting emotions, they ran to the new grave. What they saw startled them so that they almost turned back!

The rope, which had been fastened to the bell, now was tied to the foot of the post. Even as they looked, they could make out a slight movement of the rope! It grew taut, and then they could see it slacken!

"Gosh! He's come back to life!" one of the men whispered hoarsely.

"Look! Look!" his companion almost shouted, and pointed toward the air-pipe.

How it got there, they did not know, but a bucket was forced down over the end of the tube into the fresh earth, cutting off all the air supply from the coffin.

One of the grave-diggers kicked the bucket off, and then they all set to work digging. Frantically, yet fearfully, they threw out the fresh earth. Their lanterns cast weird shadows about them, and dimly lighted up the somber tombstones near by. They scarcely said a word, but when they did, it was in a very low tone.

Thud! A shovel had at last struck the wooden box. It startled the men. They were not any less courageous than the average, but their surroundings and the peculiar situation in which they found themselves would have affected the nerves of anybody.

Quickly they cleared off the top of the coffin.

"Hello! Are you alive?" one of them called in a low voice.

There was no answer.

"I think Hardings imagined they heard the bell ring," one of the men muttered.

"But didn't we see the rope move?" another objected.

"Well, you can open the lid," the first speaker added.

They held their two lanterns down inside the pit which they had just made. The yellow flames flickered and spluttered. The bravest of the four men used his shovel for a lever, and pried up the coffin top.

Slowly, hesitatingly, he peered inside. An unexpected movement from within would have caused him instantly to drop the lid.

He still could not make out the dead man's form. Carefully he jerked the top clear back, and the four spectators were terrified. If they had been out of the pit in which they stood it is doubtful whether they would have remained for a second glance. As it was, they were standing on the edge of the casket, and could not readily escape.

The old man's form was turned over, and hunched up, as if he had

vainly striven to lift the tons of earth that held him a captive. His right arm was stretched out along the side of his prison, and the nails of his fingers were torn off. The sides of the casket were clawed and scratched, and the scalp of the dead man was frightfully lacerated. All his hair had been pulled out by the roots and a wad of it was still fiercely clasped in the miser's left hand.

Even while they looked on a greater fear consumed them.

*"Ha-ha, ha-ha,"* demoniacal laughter came to their ears.

This was too much. Clawing and scrambling, they clambered over each other in trying to get out of the pit.

*"Ha-ha, ha-ha,"* the shrill laughter continued from far up the hillside.

It pursued the fleeing men. To their terrified minds the fiendish sounds seemed to be taken up and re-echoed by each of the tombstones which they passed in their flight.

"Ha-ha, ha-ha! Ha-ha, ha-ha! Ha-ha, ha-ha!" The ghostly shrieks rang in their ears, as they raced toward the village.

Unexplained, the mystery continued to frighten the superstitious for two days after the miser had been reburied. Then a tragedy partially turned their attention from this weird affair.

The body of the girl whose mother had been turned out of her home, was found floating in the river not far from the little village.

"Too bad!" the Doctor had said. "She must have lost her mind brooding over her mother's death," and this was the consensus of opinion.

And no one ever thought to associate the gentle young school teacher with the fiendish laughter which had floated over the cemetery.

## *This Story Has a Horrifying Climax*

# THE FLOOR ABOVE

### *By* M. HUMPHREYS

SEPTEMBER 17, 1922.—I sat down to breakfast this morning with a good appetite. The heat seemed over, and a cool wind blew in from my garden, where chrysanthemums were already budding. The sunshine streamed into the room and fell pleasantly on Mrs. O'Brien's broad face as she brought in the eggs and coffee. For a supposedly lonely old bachelor the world seemed to me a pretty good place. I was buttering my third set of waffles when the housekeeper again appeared, this time with the mail.

I glanced carelessly at the three or four letters beside my plate. One of them bore a strangely familiar handwriting. I gazed at it a minute, then seized it with a beating heart. Tears almost came into my eyes. There was no doubt about it—it was Arthur Barker's handwriting! Shaky and changed, to be sure, but ten years have passed since I have seen Arthur, or, rather, since his mysterious disappearance.

For ten years I have not had a word from him. His people know no more than I what has become of him, and long ago we gave him up for dead. He vanished without leaving a trace behind him. It seemed to me, too, that with him vanished the last shreds of my youth. For Arthur was my dearest friend in that happy time. We were boon companions, and many a mad prank we played together.

And now, after ten years of silence, Arthur was writing to me!

The envelope was postmarked Baltimore. Almost reluctantly—for I feared what it might contain—I passed my finger under the flap and opened it. It held a single sheet of paper torn from a pad. But it was Arthur's writing:

*"Dear Tom: Old man, can you run down to see me for a few days? I'm afraid I'm in a bad way. ARTHUR."*

Scrawled across the bottom was the address, 536 *N. Marathon street.*

I have often visited Baltimore, but I cannot recall a street of that name.

Of course I shall go. . . . But what a strange letter after ten years! There is something almost uncanny about it.

I shall go tomorrow evening. I cannot possibly get off before then.

SEPTEMBER 18.—I am leaving tonight. Mrs. O'Brien has packed my two suitcases, and everything is in readiness for my departure. Ten minutes ago I handed her the keys and she went off tearfully. She has been sniffling all day and I have been perplexed, for a curious thing occurred this morning.

It was about Arthur's letter. Yesterday, when I had finished reading it, I took it to my desk and placed it in a small compartment together with other personal papers. I remember distinctly that it was on top, with a lavender card from my sister directly underneath. This morning I went to get it. It was gone.

There was the lavender card exactly where I had seen it, but Arthur's letter had completely disappeared. I turned everything upside down, then called Mrs. O'Brien and we both searched, but in vain. Mrs. O'Brien, in spite of all I could say, took it upon herself to feel that I suspected her . . . . But what could have become of it? Fortunately I remember the address.

SEPTEMBER 19.—I have arrived. I have seen Arthur. Even now he is in the next room and I am supposed to be preparing for bed. But something tells me I shall not sleep a wink this night. I am strangely wrought up, though there is not the shadow of an excuse for my excitement. I should be rejoicing to have found my friend again. And yet. . . .

I reached Baltimore this morning at eleven o'clock. The day was warm and beautiful, and I loitered outside the station a few minutes before calling a taxi. The driver seemed well acquainted with the street I gave him, and we rolled off across the bridge.

As I drew near my destination, I began to feel anxious and afraid. But the ride lasted longer than I expected—Marathon Street seemed to be located in the suburbs of the city. At last we turned into a dusty street, paved only in patches and lined with linden and aspen trees. The fallen leaves crunched beneath the tires. The September sun beat down with a white intensity. The taxi drew up before a house in the middle of a block that boasted not more than six dwellings. On each side of the house was a vacant lot, and it was set far back at the end of a long narrow yard crowded with trees.

I paid the driver, opened the gate and went in. The trees were so thick that not until I was half way up the path did I get a good view of the house. It was three stories high, built of brick, in fairly good repair, but lonely and deserted-looking. The blinds were closed in all of the windows with the exception of two, one on the first, one on the second floor. Not a sign of life anywhere, not a cat nor a milk bottle to break the monotony of the leaves that carpeted the porch.

But, overcoming my feeling of uneasiness, I resolutely set my suitcase on the porch, caught at the old-fashioned bell, and gave an energetic jerk. A startling peal jangled through the silence. I waited, but there was no answer.

After a minute I rang again. Then from the interior I heard a queer dragging sound, as if someone was coming slowly down the hall. The knob was turned and the door opened. I saw before me an old woman, wrinkled, withered, and filmy-eyed, who leaned on a crutch.

"Does Mr. Barker live here?" I asked.

She nodded, staring at me in a curious way, but made no move to invite me in.

"Well, I've come to see him," I said. "I'm a friend of his. He sent for me."

At that she drew slightly aside.

"He's upstairs," she said in a cracked voice that was little more than a whisper. "I can't show you up. Hain't been up a stair now in ten year."

"That's all right," I replied, and, seizing my suitcase, I strode down the long hall.

"At the head of the steps," came the whispering voice behind me. "The door at the end of the hall,"

I climbed the cold dark stairway, passed along the short hall at the top, and stood before a closed door. I knocked.

"Come in." It was Arthur's voice, and yet—not his.

I opened the door and saw Arthur sitting on a couch, his shoulders hunched over, his eyes raised to mine.

After all, ten years had not changed him so much. As I remembered him, he was of medium height, inclined to be stout, and ruddy-faced with keen gray eyes. He was still stout, but had lost his color, and his eyes had dulled.

"And where have you been all this time?" I demanded, when the first greetings were over.

"Here," he answered.

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"But why didn't you let us hear from you?"

He seemed to be making an effort to speak.

"What did it matter? I didn't suppose any one cared."

Perhaps it was my imagination, but I could not get rid of the thought that Arthur's pale eyes fixed tenaciously upon my face, were trying to tell me something, something quite different from what his lips said.

I felt chilled. Although the blinds were open, the room was almost darkened by the branches of the trees that pressed against the window. Arthur had not given me his hand, had seemed troubled to know how to make me welcome. Yet of one thing I was certain: He needed me and he wanted me to know he needed me.

As I took a chair I glanced about the room. It was a typical lodging-house room, medium sized, flowered wall paper, worn matting, nondescript rugs, a wash-stand in one corner, a chiffonier in another, a table in the center, two or three chairs, and the couch which evidently served Arthur as a bed. But it was cold, strangely cold for such a warm day.

Arthur's eyes had wandered uneasily to my suitcase. He made an effort to drag himself to his feet.

"Your room is back here," he said, with a motion of his thumb.

"No, wait," I protested. "Let's talk about yourself first. What's wrong?"

"I've been sick."

"Haven't you a doctor? If not, I'll get one."

At this he started up with the first sign of animation he had shown.

"No, Tom, don't do it. Doctors can't help me now. Besides, I hate them. I'm afraid of them."

His voice trailed away, and I took pity on his agitation. I decided to let the question of doctors drop for the moment.

"As you say," I assented carelessly.

Without more ado, I followed him into my room, which adjoined his and was furnished in much the same fashion. But there were two windows, one on each side, looking out on the vacant lots. Consequently, there was more light, for which I was thankful. In a far corner I noticed a door, heavily bolted.

"There's one more room," said Arthur, as I deposited my belongings. "One that you'll like. But we'll have to go through the bath-room."

Groping our way through the musty bath-room, in which a tiny jet of gas was flickering, we stepped into a large, almost luxurious chamber. It was a library, well-furnished, carpeted, and surrounded by shelves fairly bulging with books. But for the chillness and bad light, it was perfect. As I moved about, Arthur followed me with his eyes.

"There are some rare works on botany—"

I had already discovered them, a set of books that I would have given much to own. I could not contain my joy.

"You won't be so bored browsing around in here—"

In spite of my preoccupation, I pricked up my ears. In that monotonous voice there was no sympathy with my joy. It was cold and tired.

When I had satisfied my curiosity we returned to the front room, and Arthur flung himself, or rather fell, upon the couch. It was nearly five o'clock and quite dark. As I lighted the gas, I heard a sound below as of somebody thumping on the wall.

"That's the old woman," Arthur explained. "She cooks my meals, but she's too lame to bring them up."

He made a feeble attempt at rising, but I saw he was worn out.

"Don't stir," I warned him. "I'll bring up your food tonight."

To my surprise, I found the dinner appetizing and well-cooked, and, in spite of the fact that I did not like the looks of the old woman, I ate with relish. Arthur barely touched a few spoonfuls of soup to his lips and absently crumbled some bread in his plate.

Directly I had carried off the dishes, he wrapped his reddish-brown dressing-gown about him, stretched out at full length on the couch, and asked me to turn out the gas. When I had complied with his request, I again heard his weak voice asking if I had everything I needed.

"Everything," I assured him, and then there was unbroken silence.

I went to my room, finally, closed the door, and here I am sitting restlessly between the two back windows that look out on the vacant lots.

I have unpacked my clothes and turned down the bed, but I cannot make up my mind to retire. If the truth be told, I hate to put out the light. . . . There is something disturbing in the way the dry leaves tap on the panes. And my heart is sad when I think of Arthur.

I have found my old friend, but he is no longer my old friend. Why does he fix his pale eyes so strangely on my face? What does he wish to tell me?

But these are morbid thoughts. I will put them out of my head. I will go to bed and get a good night's rest. And tomorrow I will wake up finding everything right and as it should be.

SEPTEMBER 26.—Have been here a week today, and I have settled down to this queer existence as if I had never known another. The day after my arrival I discovered that the third volume of the botanical series was done in Latin, which I have set myself the task of translating. It is absorbing work, and when I have buried myself in one of the deep chairs by the library table, the hours fly fast.

For health's sake I force myself to walk a few miles every day. I have tried to prevail on Arthur to do likewise, but he, who used to be so active, now refuses to budge from the house. No wonder he is literally blue! For it is a fact that his complexion and the shadows about his eyes and temples, are decidedly blue.

What does he do with himself all day? Whenever I enter his room, he is lying on the couch, a book beside him, which he never reads. He does not seem to suffer any pain, for he never complains. After several ineffectual attempts to get medical aid for him, I have given up mentioning the subject of a doctor. I feel that his trouble is more mental than physical.

SEPTEMBER 28.—A rainy day. It has been coming down in floods since dawn. And I got a queer turn this afternoon.

As I could not get out for my walk, I spent the morning staging a general house-cleaning. It was time! Dust and dirt everywhere. The bath-room, which has no window and is lighted by gas, was fairly overrun with water-bugs and roaches. Of course I did not penetrate to Arthur's room, but I heard no sound from him as I swept and dusted.

I made a good dinner and settled down in the library, feeling quite cosy. The rain came down steadily and it had grown so cold that I decided to make a fire later on. But once I had gathered my tablets and notebooks about me I forgot the cold.

I remember I was on the subject of the *Aster Tripolium*, a rare variety seldom found in this country. Turning a page, I came upon a specimen of this very variety, dried, pressed flat, and pasted to the margin. Above it, in Arthur's handwriting, I read:

*September* 27, 1912.

I was bending close to examine it, when I felt a vague fear. It seemed to me that someone was in the room and was watching me. Yet I had not heard the door open, nor seen anyone enter. I turned sharply and saw Arthur, wrapped in his reddish-brown dressing-gown, standing at my very elbow.

He was smiling—smiling for the first time since my arrival, and his dull eyes were bright. But I did not like that smile. In spite of myself I jerked away from him. He pointed at the aster.

"It grew in the front yard under a linden tree. I found it yesterday."

"Yesterday!" I shouted, my nerves on edge. "Good Lord man! Look! It was ten years ago!"

The smile faded from his face.

"Ten years ago," he repeated thickly. *"Ten years ago?"*

And with his hand pressed against his forehead, he went out of the room still muttering, *"Ten years ago!"*

. . . .

As for me, this foolish incident has preyed on my mind and kept me from doing any satisfactory work. . . . . *September* 27th . . . . It is true, that was also yesterday—ten years ago.

OCTOBER 1.—One o'clock. A cheerful morning this has been, the sun shining brightly, and a touch of frost in the air. I put in an excellent day's work in the library yesterday, and on the first mail this morning came a letter from Mrs. O'Brien. She says the *Scarab* chrys-

chrysanthemums are in full bloom. I must positively run up for a day before they are gone.

As I lighted a cigar after breakfast, I happened to glance over at Arthur and was struck by a change in him. For he *has* changed. I ask myself if my presence has not done him good. On my arrival he seemed without energy, almost torpid, but now he is becoming restless. He wanders about the room continually and sometimes shows a disposition to talk.

Yes, I am sure he is better. I am going for my walk now, and I feel convinced that in a week's time I shall have him accompanying me.

FIVE o'clock. Dusk is falling. O God! What has come over me? Am I the same man that went out of this house three hours ago? And what has happened! . . . .

I had a splendid walk, and was striding homeward in a fine glow. But as I turned the corner and came in sight of the house, it was as if I looked at death itself. I could hardly drag myself up the stairs, and when I peered into the shadowy chamber, and saw the man hunched up on the couch, with his eyes fixed intently on my face, I could have screamed like a woman. I wanted to fly, to rush out into the clear cold air and run—to run and never come back! But I controlled myself, forced my feet to carry me to my room.

There is a weight of hopelessness at my heart. The darkness is advancing, swallowing up everything, but I have not the will to light the gas. . . .

Now there is a flicker in the front room. I am a fool; I must pull myself together. Arthur is lighting up, and downstairs I can hear the thumping that announces dinner. . . .

It is a queer thought that comes to me now, but it is odd I have not noticed it before. We are about to sit down to our evening meal. Arthur will eat practically nothing for he has no appetite. Yet he remains stout. It cannot be healthy fat, but even at that it seems to me that a man who eats as little as he does would become a living skeleton.

OCTOBER 5.—Positively, I must see a doctor about myself, or soon I shall be a nervous wreck. I am acting like a child. Last night I lost all control and played the coward.

I had gone to bed early, tired out with a hard day's work. It was raining again, and as I lay in bed I watched the little rivulets trickling down the panes. Lulled by the sighing of the wind among the leaves, I fell asleep.

I awoke (how long afterward I cannot say) to feel a cold hand laid on my arm. For a moment I lay paralyzed with terror. I would have cried aloud, but I had no voice. At last I managed to sit up, to shake the hand off. I reached for the matches and lighted the gas.

It was Arthur who stood by my bed—Arthur wrapped in his eternal reddish-brown dressing-gown. He was excited. His blue face had a yellow tinge, and his eyes gleamed in the light.

"Listen!" he whispered.

I listened but I heard nothing.

"Don't you hear it?" he gasped, and he pointed upward.

"Upstairs?" I stammered. "Is there somebody upstairs?"

I strained my ears, and at last I fancied I could hear a fugitive sound like the light tapping of footsteps.

"It must be somebody walking about up there," I suggested.

But at these words Arthur seemed to stiffen. The excitement died out of his face.

"No!" he cried in a sharp rasping voice. "No! It is nobody walking about up there!"

And he fled into his room.

For a long time I lay trembling, afraid to move. But at last, fearing for Arthur, I got up and crept to his door. He was lying on the couch, with his face in the moonlight, apparently asleep.

OCTOBER 6.—I had a talk with Arthur today. Yesterday I could not bring myself to speak of the previous night's happening, but all of this nonsense must be cleared away.

We were in the library. A fire was burning in the grate, and Arthur had his feet on the fender. The slippers he wears, by the way, are as objectionable to me as his dressing-gown. They are felt slippers, old and worn, and frayed around the edges as if they had been gnawed by rats. I cannot imagine why he does not get a new pair.

"Say, old man," I began abruptly, "do you own this house?"

He nodded.

"Don't you rent any of it?"

"Downstairs—to Mrs. Harlan."

"But upstairs?"

He hesitated, then shook his head.

"No, it's inconvenient. There's only a peculiar way to get upstairs."

I was struck by this.

"By jove! you're right. Where's the staircase?"

He looked me full in the eyes.

"Don't you remember seeing a bolted door in a corner of your room? The staircase runs from that door."

I did remember it, and somehow the memory made me uncomfortable. I said no more and decided not to refer to what had happened that night. It occurred to me that Arthur might have been walking in his sleep.

OCTOBER 8.—When I went for my walk on Tuesday I dropped in and saw Dr. Lorraine, who is an old friend. He expressed some surprise at my run-down condition and wrote me a prescription.

I am planning to go home next week. How pleasant it will be to walk in my garden and listen to Mrs. O'Brien singing in the kitchen!

OCTOBER 9.—Perhaps I had better postpone my trip. I casually mentioned it to Arthur this morning.

He was lying relaxed on the sofa, but when I spoke of leaving he sat up as straight as a bolt. His eyes fairly blazed.

"No, Tom, don't go!" There was terror in his voice, and such pleading that it wrung my heart.

"You've stood it alone here ten years," I protested. "And now—"

"It's not that," he said. "But if you go, you will never come back."

"Is that all the faith you have in me?"

"I've got faith, Tom. But if you go, you'll never come back."

I decided that I must humor the vagaries of a sick man.

"All right," I agreed. "I'll not go. Anyway, not for some time."

OCTOBER 12.—What is it that hangs over this house like a cloud? For I can no longer deny that there *is* something—something indescribably oppressive. It seems to pervade the whole neighborhood.

Are all the houses on this block vacant? If not, why do I never see children playing in the street? Why are passers-by so rare? And why, when from the front window I do catch a glimpse of one, is he hastening away as fast as possible?

I am feeling blue again. I know that I need a change, and this morning I told Arthur definitely that I was going.

To my surprise he made no objection. In fact, he murmured a word of assent and smiled. He smiled as he smiled in the library that morning when he pointed at the *Aster Tripolium*. And I don't like that smile. Anyway, it is settled. I shall go next week, Thursday, the 19th.

OCTOBER 13.—I had a strange dream last night. Or was it a dream? It was so vivid. . . . All day long I have been seeing it over and over again.

In my dream I thought that I was lying there in my bed. The moon was shining brightly into the room, so that each piece of furniture stood

out distinctly. The bureau is so placed that when I am lying on my back, with my head high on the pillow, I can see full into the mirror.

I thought I was lying in this manner and staring into the mirror. In this way I saw the bolted door in the far corner of the room. I tried to keep my mind off it, to think of something else, but it drew my eyes like a magnet.

It seemed to me that someone was in the room, a vague figure that I could not recognize. It approached the door and caught at the bolts. It dragged at them and struggled, but in vain—they would not give way.

Then it turned and showed me its agonized face. It was Arthur! I recognized his reddish-brown dressing-gown.

I sat up in bed and cried to him, but he was gone. I ran to his room, and there he was, stretched out in the moonlight asleep. It must have been a dream.

OCTOBER 15.—We are having Indian Summer weather now—almost oppressively warm. I have been wandering about all day, unable to settle down to anything. This morning I felt so lonesome that when I took the breakfast dishes down, I tried to strike up a conversation with Mrs. Harlan.

Hitherto I have found her as solemn and uncommunicative as the Sphinx, but as she took the tray from my hands, her wrinkles broke into the semblance of a smile. Positively at that moment it seemed to me that she resembled Arthur. Was it her smile, or the expression of her eyes? Has she, also, something to tell me?

"Don't you get lonesome here?" I asked her sympathetically.

She shook her head.

"No, sir, I'm used to it now. I couldn't stand it anywheres else."

"And do you expect to go on living here the rest of your life?"

"That may not be very long, sir," she said, and smiled again.

Her words were simple enough, but the way she looked at me when she uttered them seemed to give them a double meaning. She hobbled away, and I went upstairs and wrote Mrs. O'Brien to expect me early on the morning of the 19th.

OCTOBER 18., 10 a. m.—Am catching the twelve o'clock train tonight. Thank God, I had the resolution to get away! I believe another week of this life would drive me mad. And perhaps Arthur is right—perhaps I shall never come back.

I ask myself if I have become such a weakling as that, to desert him when he needs me most. I don't know. I don't recognize myself any longer. . . .

But of course I will be back. There is the translation, for one thing, which is coming along famously. I could never forgive myself for dropping it at the most vital point.

As for Arthur, when I return, I intend to give in to him no longer. I will make myself master here and cure him against his will. Fresh air, change of scene, a good doctor, these are the things he needs.

But what is his malady? Is it the influence of this house that has fallen on him like a blight? One might imagine so, since it is having the same effect on me.

Yes, I have reached that point where I no longer sleep. At night I lie awake and try to keep my eyes off the mirror across the room. But in the end I always find myself staring into it—watching the door with the heavy bolts. I long to rise from the bed and draw back the bolts, but I'm afraid.

How slowly the day goes by! The night will never come!

NINE P. M.—Have packed my suitcase and put the room in order. Arthur must be asleep. . . . I'm afraid the parting from him will be painful. I shall leave here at eleven o'clock in order to give myself plenty of time. . . . It is beginning to rain. . . .

OCTOBER 19.—At last! It has come! I am mad! I knew it! I felt it creeping on me all the time! Have I not lived in this house a month? Have I not seen—. To have seen what I have seen, to have lived for a month as I have lived, one *must* be mad. . . .

It was ten o'clock. I was waiting impatiently for the last hour to pass. I had seated myself in a rocking-chair by the bed, my suitcase beside me, my back to the mirror. The rain no longer fell. I must have dozed off.

But all at once I was wide awake, my heart beating furiously. Something had touched me. I leapt to my feet, and, turning sharply, my eyes fell upon the mirror. In it I saw the door just as I had seen it the other night, and the figure fumbling with the bolt. I wheeled around, but there was nothing there.

I told myself that I was dreaming again, that Arthur was asleep in his bed. But I trembled as I opened the door of his room and peered in. The room was empty, the bed not even crumpled. Lighting a match, I groped my way through the bathroom into the library.

The moon had come from under a cloud and was pouring in a silvery flood through the windows, but Arthur was not there. I stumbled back into my room.

The moon was there, too. . . . And the door, the door in the corner was half open. The bolt had been drawn. In the darkness I could just make out a flight of steps that wound upward.

I could no longer hesitate. Striking another match, I climbed the black stairway.

When I reached the top I found myself in total darkness, for the blinds were tightly closed. Realizing that the room was probably a duplicate of the one below, I felt along the wall until I came to the gas jet. For a moment the flame flickered, then burned bright and clear.

O God! what was it I saw? A table, thick with dust, and something wrapped in a reddish-brown dressing-gown, that sat with its elbows propped upon it.

How long had it been sitting there that it had grown more dry than the dust upon the table! For how many thousands of days and nights had the flesh rotted from that grinning skull!

In its bony fingers it still clutched a pencil. In front of it lay a sheet of scratch paper, yellow with age. With trembling fingers I brushed away the dust. It was dated *October* 19, 1912. It read:

*"Dear Tom: Old man, can you run down to see me for a few days? I'm afraid I'm in a bad way—"*

## Reads Story of Mankind on Egyptian Coffins

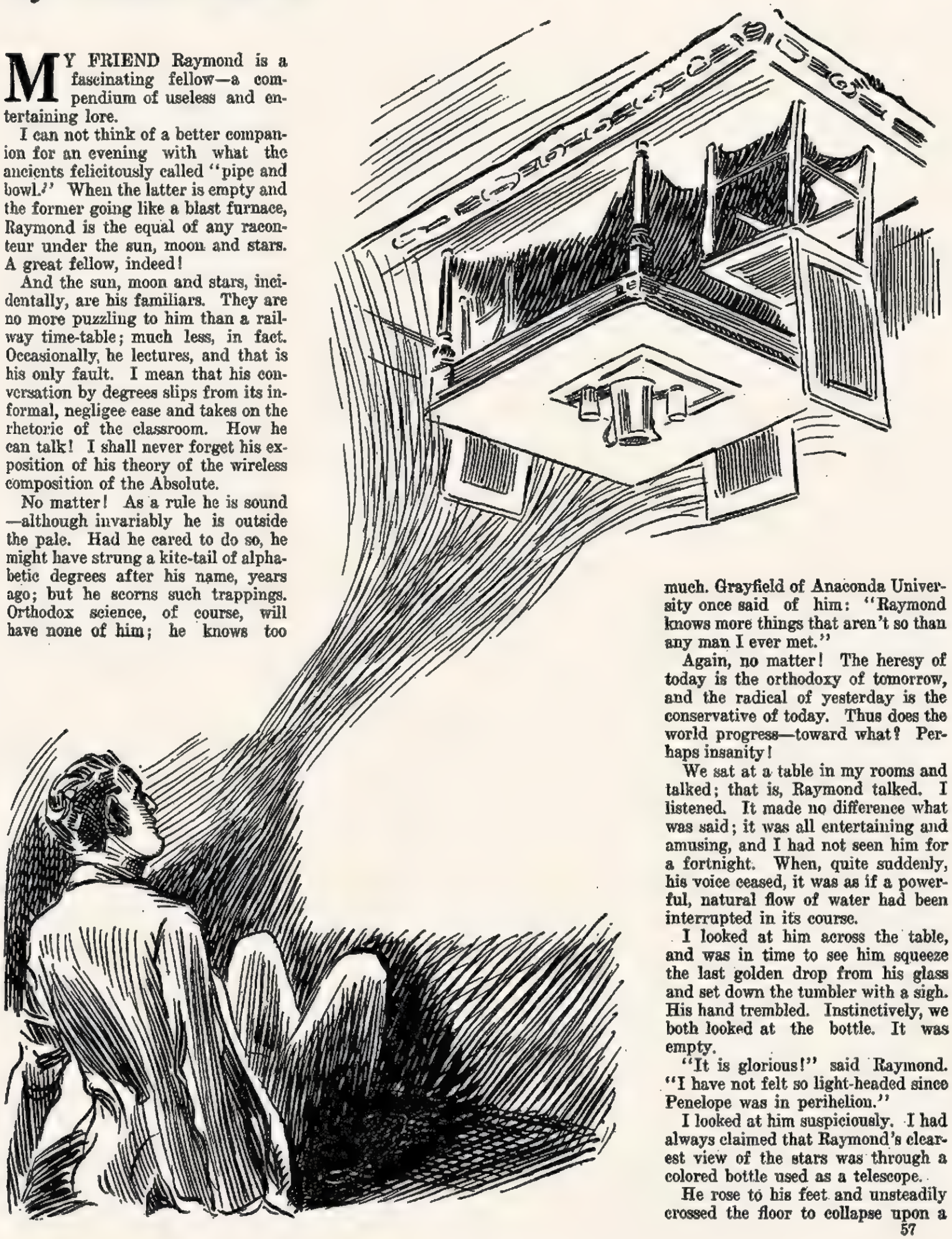
**PROF. JAMES H. BREASTED, Egyptologist and director of the Haskell Oriental Museum at the University of Chicago, is solving some of the mysteries of the beginning of the human race by inspecting sarcophagi of Egyptian kings. From Cairo, he wrote to his associate, Dr. William S. Edgerton:**

**"You will be interested to know that Gardener and I have settled down at the museum and have already devoted a week to the task we are undertaking. We have a very large amount of space placed at our disposal, and our gallery, over 100 feet long, is already filled with dismounted coffins. The photographer is busily at work, and Gardener and I are copying industriously. The task proved to be far larger than we had anticipated and also very much more difficult. It will be a matter of years, but I have never been more convinced of its necessity and usefulness than now."**

*Here's a Grotesque, Fantastic Tale*

# PENELOPE

## *By* Vincent Starrett



MY FRIEND Raymond is a fascinating fellow—a compendium of useless and entertaining lore.

I can not think of a better companion for an evening with what the ancients felicitously called "pipe and bowl." When the latter is empty and the former going like a blast furnace, Raymond is the equal of any raconteur under the sun, moon and stars. A great fellow, indeed!

And the sun, moon and stars, incidentally, are his familiars. They are no more puzzling to him than a railway time-table; much less, in fact. Occasionally, he lectures, and that is his only fault. I mean that his conversation by degrees slips from its informal, negligee ease and takes on the rhetoric of the classroom. How he can talk! I shall never forget his exposition of his theory of the wireless composition of the Absolute.

No matter! As a rule he is sound—although invariably he is outside the pale. Had he cared to do so, he might have strung a kite-tail of alphabetic degrees after his name, years ago; but he scorns such trappings. Orthodox science, of course, will have none of him; he knows too much. Grayfield of Anaconda University once said of him: "Raymond knows more things that aren't so than any man I ever met."

Again, no matter! The heresy of today is the orthodoxy of tomorrow, and the radical of yesterday is the conservative of today. Thus does the world progress—toward what? Perhaps insanity!

We sat at a table in my rooms and talked; that is, Raymond talked. I listened. It made no difference what was said; it was all entertaining and amusing, and I had not seen him for a fortnight. When, quite suddenly, his voice ceased, it was as if a powerful, natural flow of water had been interrupted in its course.

I looked at him across the table, and was in time to see him squeeze the last golden drop from his glass and set down the tumbler with a sigh. His hand trembled. Instinctively, we both looked at the bottle. It was empty.

"It is glorious!" said Raymond. "I have not felt so light-headed since Penelope was in perihelion."

I looked at him suspiciously. I had always claimed that Raymond's clearest view of the stars was through a colored bottle used as a telescope.

He rose to his feet and unsteadily crossed the floor to collapse upon a

couch. In an instant he was asleep and snoring. It was the promptest performance by the man that I had ever seen, and I was lost in admiration. But as my wife was due at any moment, I withheld my wonder and shook him into wakefulness. After a bit he sat up with a stare.

"Give us an arm, old chap," he murmured; and after a moment: "The heat here is awful."

I assisted him to his feet, and we ricocheted to the balcony upon which long doors opened at the front of the room. The light breeze impinged pleasantly upon our senses. We were two floors up, and from somewhere below ascended the strains of a banjo played pianissimo.

Raymond draped a long arm across my shoulders and, thus fortified, closed one eye and looked into the heavens. The other arm described an arc and developed a rigid finger, pointing upward.

"Look!" he said. "It is the star Penelope!"

I restrained an inclination to laugh. "Which?" I asked, although it was quite clear that Raymond was drunk.

He indicated, and I allowed myself to be persuaded that I saw it. Penelope, I learned later, is a small star of about the thirtieth magnitude, which, on a clear night and with a powerful glass, may be picked up midway between the constellations of the Pleiades and Ursa Major. It is a comparatively insignificant star, and that Raymond actually saw it I still greatly doubt.

But the sight, real or fancied, was tonic. It was as if that remote point of fire had thrilled him with a life-ray. He straightened, sobered, became grave. The pointing finger was withdrawn.

"Diccon," he said, giving me a familiar and affectionate pseudonym, "I have never told you of my connection with the star Penelope. There are few that know. Those whom I have told have looked upon me as mad. If I have concealed from you this, my strangest adventure, you must believe that it was because I valued your opinion of my sanity. Tonight——"

Again he turned his gaze upward, and I pretended to see that distant star. His voice became reminiscent, introspective.

"Penelope," he whispered, "Penelope! Only yesterday it seems that you were under my feet!"

He suddenly turned.

"Come," he commanded. "Come into the house. I feel that I must tell you tonight."

HASWELL [began my friend Raymond], I shall not ask your belief; to you the tale will seem incredible. I shall ask only your attention and—your sympathy.

The star Penelope is my natal star. Born under its baleful influence, I have been subjected to that influence ever since. You will recall that my father before me was deeply interested in astronomy, so deeply that his researches gained him the jealous enmity of the world's greatest scientists—"Mad Raymond," they called him.

You will also recall that he died in an asylum; but, my dear Haswell, he was no more mad than I. But there is no denying that his astounding knowledge, and the equally astounding inferences and deductions he drew therefrom, made him a marked man in his day. It is dangerous to be a hundred years ahead of one's fellows.

My father discovered the star Penelope, and—as if a strange pre-natal influence thus had been brought to bear upon his parenthood—it was my natal star. The circumstance was sufficient to enlist his whole interest, after my birth, in the star Penelope. He had calculated that its orbit was so vast that fifty years would be required to complete it. I was with my father when he died, and his last words to me were:

"Beware of Penelope when in perihelion."

He died shortly afterward, and it was little enough that I could learn of his thought; but from his dying whispers I gathered that with Penelope in perihelion a sinister influence would enter my life. The star would then possess its greatest power over me for evil. The exact nature of its effect I think he could not himself foretell or even guess, but he feared a material change that would affect not only my mental but my physical being.

My father's warning was uttered ten years ago, and I have never forgotten it. And through the long, silent nights—following his footsteps—I watched the relentless approach of the star which was to have so fateful an influence upon my destiny.

Three years ago I insensibly became aware of its proximity. As it came nearer it seemed that little messengers were sent forth to herald its coming. Like a shadow cast before, I recognized—I felt—the adumbrations of its power. Little whispers of its influence crossed the distances and reached me before its central intelligence was felt in all its terror.

I struggled against it, as a man frantically seeks to escape the coiling tentacles of a monster irresistibly drawing him nearer. I feared that I would commit some dreadful crime, or that I would go mad—knowing that either would have been a relief. And there was no one to whom I could tell my appalling apprehensions. The merest whisper of my situation would have branded me a lunatic.

Two years ago I set myself the task of calculating the exact time when the star Penelope would attain its perihelion with our sun, and a long series of computations assured me that on the twenty-sixth day of the following October Penelope would be in the zenith.

That was a year ago last October. Perhaps you will recall that for a week I was absent from my usual haunts? When you saw me later you asked where I had been, and remarked that I was looking peaked. I said I had been out of town, but I lied. I had been in hiding in my rooms—not that I believed four walls could avert the impending disaster, whatever it might be, but to avert from my friends and from the public the possible consequences of my deeds.

I shut myself in my study, locked the door, and threw the key out of the window. Then, alone and unaided, I sat down to await the moment and the catastrophe.

To divert my mind, I attacked a problem which always had bothered me and which, indeed, still remains unsolved. In the midst of my calculations, overcome with weariness and lack of sleep, I sank into a profound slumber. My dreams were hideous. Then, suddenly, I awoke, with a dizzy feeling of falling.

How shall I tell you what I saw? It seemed that while I slept the room had been entered and cleared of its furniture. No vestige of impedimenta remained. Even the carpet was gone, and I was lying at full length on the floor, the boards of which had been replaced with plaster and whitewash.

The room seemed stifling, and, remembering that I had left the window slightly down for ventilation, I stood up and walked across to it. It stood close down, almost against the floor—an extraordinary removal—and whoever had emptied the room also had closed the window at the top and opened it at the bottom. I had to kneel down to lean out across the sill.

I am telling all this calmly. Perhaps you will imagine the state of my mind, however. I was far indeed from calm. There are no words to tell you my bewilderment. But if I had been amazed by the condition of the room, I was confounded when I looked out into the night. I was literally so frightened that I could not utter a sound.

I had looked down, expecting to look into the street; and there were the stars shining below me, millions of miles away. And yet the noises of the street fell distinctly on my ears. The earth seemed to have melted away beneath my dwelling, which apparently hung upside down in the sky; but the sounds of traffic and human voices were all about me.

A horror that made me dizzy had crept over me, but, gripping the narrow sill with both hands, I twisted my face fearfully upward. Then for the first time a scream left my lips.

Above me, not thirty feet away, was the street filled with its accustomed hum and populated with people and with traffic—all upside down.

Men and women walked the pavement, head downward, as a fly walks the ceiling. Automobiles rolled past in frantic procession, their tops toward me, their wheels miraculously clinging to the overhanging roadway.

You, by this time, will have comprehended what had happened. I did not. Frightened, bewildered, half-mad, I drew in my head and fell back upon the whitewashed floor; and then, as I lay there upon my back, I saw what I had not seen before. On the ceiling of the room, clinging to it, head downward as the motors had clung to the street, was the missing furniture of my study.

It was arranged precisely as I had left it, except that it was *upside down* and appeared to have changed sides. The heavy desk at which I had sat hung directly over me, and with a gasp of terror I jumped aside; I thought that it would fall and crush me. The missing carpet was spread across the ceiling, and the tables and chairs reposed upon it; the books on table and bookcase hung easily from the under-surface, and none fell.

I pulled out my watch, and it slipped from my hand and shot upward the length of the chain. When I had recovered it, I looked at the hour, and everything that I wished to know flashed over me.

*It was midnight, and Penelope was in perihelion!*

The influence of my natal star had overcome the pitiful attraction of the earth, and I had been released from earth's influence. I was now held by the gravity of the star Penelope. The earth remained as it had been; the house was not upside down; only I! And I had thought I had fallen from my chair! Ye Gods, I had *risen* from it—as *you* would understand it—and had crashed against the ceiling of my room!

I sat there, upside down from the earth point of view, upon the ceiling of my study, and considered my position. Then I stood up and paced back and forth across the ceiling, and as I moved coins and keys fell from my pockets and dropped downward —upward—as you will—to the floor of the room.

One thing was clear. I had averted a very serious disaster by clinging to the window-frame when I looked out. With that fearsome influence upon me, a moment of overbalancing would have pulled me over the edge, and I should have been precipitated into the awful depths of space which gleamed like an ocean beneath my window.

Mad as was the thought, I wondered what time would be required for my cometlike flight to the shores of the star Penelope. I saw myself speeding like a meteor across those tremendous distances to plunge at last into the heart of the Infinite mystery. Even while I shook with the sick horror of the thought, it was not without its allure.

The heat of the room was great, for heat rises and I was on the ceiling. A human desire to leave the study and go outside seized me, and, perilous as I knew the action to be, I resolved to try it.

I walked across to the door of my study, but it was so high above my head that I could not grasp the knob. I remembered, too, that I had locked the door and thrown away the key. Fortunately, the transom was open, and as this was nearer to me I made a spring and grasped its frame. Then, painfully, I pulled myself up and managed to climb through, dropping to the ceiling on the other side.

It was dark in the corridor, and as I crossed the ceiling I heard footsteps ascending the stairs, which were above and to one side of me. Then a candle flickered around the bend, and my landlord came into view, walking head downward like the rest of the world.

In his hand he grasped what, as he came nearer, I made out to be a revolver. Apparently he had heard the strange noises from my part of the house and was intent on inquiring their meaning. I trembled, for I knew that if he caught sight of me, upside down as he would think, against the ceiling, he would instantly shoot me—supposing he did not faint from fright.

But he did not see me, and after prowling about for twenty minutes he went away satisfied, and I was left to make my way out of the house as best I could.

I felt curiously light, as if I had lost many pounds of weight, which indeed must have been the case; and I made very little sound as I trod the ceilings toward the back of the house, where I knew there was a fire-escape leading to the street. The door into the rear room was open, and I clambered over the obstacle interposed by the top of its frame and entered the chamber, crossing quietly to the window.

I dared not look down as I climbed through the aperture, but once I had seized the ironwork of the fire-escape I felt more at ease; then carefully I began my strange *upward* climb toward the overhanging street. To any one looking up I would have seemed to be a whimsical acrobat coming down the ironwork on his hands, and I suppose I would have created a sensation.

At the bottom my difficulties began, for I could not hope to remain on the earth without support; walking on my hands would not solve the puzzle. The pull of Penelope was exactly the pull of the earth when one hangs by his hands from a height. With fear in my heart, I began my extraordinary journey, toward the street, taking advantage of every inequality in the foundation of the house, and often I was clinging desperately to a single little shelf of brick, for while ostensibly I was walking on my hands, actually I was hanging at a fearful height in momentary danger of dropping into the immeasurable abyss of the sky beneath me.

An iron fence ran around the house, and at one point it was close enough for me to reach out a hand and seize it. Then, with a shudder, I drew myself across onto its iron pickets, where, after a bit, I felt safer.

The fence offered a real support, for the iron frame about its top became a narrow but strong rest for my feet. But the fence was not particularly high, and as I progressed the earth, owing to the inequalities of the ground, often was only a few inches above my head. Anyone stopping to look would have seen a man—a madman, as he would have supposed—standing on his head against the iron fence, and occasionally moving forward by convulsive movements of his rigid arms.

The traffic had thinned, and there seemed to be few pedestrians on my side of the thoroughfare. A wild idea seized me—to negotiate the distance to your home, Haswell, clinging to the fences along the way. I thought it could be done, and you were the only person to whom I felt I could tell my strange story with a hope of belief.

Had I attempted the journey, I should have been lost without a doubt; somewhere along the way my arm sockets would have rebelled, my grasp would have torn away, and I would have been plunged into the depths of a star-strewn space and become a wanderer in the void speed-

ing toward an unimagined destiny. As it happened, this was not to be.

I had reached the end of the side fence, and was just beginning to make my way around to the front, when I was seen by a woman—a young woman, who came along the street at that moment. I knew nothing of her presence until her muffled scream reached my ears. Seeing me standing apparently on my head, she thought me a maniac.

To me she seemed a woman upside down, and I looked into her face as one looks into a reflection in the depths of a pool. A street lamp depended from the pavement above me and not far from my position of the moment, and in its light I saw that her face was young and sweet. I wonder, Haswell, if there can be any situation, however incredible, in which the face of a lovely woman will not command attention? I think not.

Well, it was a sweet face—and she did not scream again. I said to her: "Please do not be frightened. I am not crazy, although I do not wonder that you think so. Preposterous as it may seem, I am for the time being in a normal position; were I to stand upon the earth as you do, I would—"

I was going to say that I would vanish from her side, but I realized that this would be too much for her.

"I would be suffocated," I finished. "The blood would rush to my head, and I would die."

Then she spoke, and her voice was filled with tenderness. It was easy to understand that she believed me quite mad; but she did not fear me.

"You are ill," she said. "You need assistance. May I not go for help? Is there not someone you would like summoned?"

Again, Haswell, I thought of you. But would she carry a message? Would she not, instead, go for the police? Was she not even now meditating a ruse by which I might be captured before I did myself an injury? And I knew now that I could not continue by myself. Sooner or later I would be forced to drop, or I would certainly meet—not a handsome young woman but a policeman. My mind was quickly made up. I said to her:

"Thank you, my dear, for your offer; but you are in error. There is nobody who can help me now; perhaps there never will be. But this is my home here, behind me, and rather than frighten people I shall go back as I came and stay within doors. But I appreciate your kindness, and I am glad that you do not believe me mad and that you are not afraid of me. It may be that some day I shall be cured of this strange trouble, and if that day comes I should like to meet you again and thank you. Will you tell me your name?"

Then she told me her name, flutteringly, and—I almost screamed again.

Her name, Haswell, was *Penelope!* Penelope Pollard!

I all but let go of the railing that supported me, and as I wavered and seemed about to fall she gave a low cry and, turning, ran away into the darkness.

She had gone for help. I knew it, and shortly I knew that I would be the center of an embarrassing and probably a jeering crowd. And so I turned and went back. The return journey was worse than the forward journey had been, but after an agony of tortured limbs and straining sinews I found myself back in my study, and there, thoroughly worn out, I fell prone upon the floor— or the ceiling—in a corner, and went instantly to sleep.

Hours later, when I awoke, I was lying on the carpeted floor of my study, and the sun was pouring in at my window as it had done in past years. Again I was subordinate to the laws of terrestrial gravity. I fancy that as the influence passed I slid gradually down the wall until, without shock, I reached the floor.

My landlord was beating upon my door, and after a dazed moment or two I rose and tried to let him in. But as I had thrown away the key, I had to pretend that I had lost it and had accidentally made myself a prisoner. When he had freed me, I asked him if there had been any inquiry after me, and he told me there had not. So it seemed that my fair friend of the night before had not returned with a posse of bluecoats. I was grateful and I determined at the first opportunity to look her up.

From that day forward I looked for her—Penelope Pollard. I traced Pollards until I almost hated the name. There were Sylvias and Graces and Sarahs and Janes and all the thousand and one other epithets bestowed on feminine innocence, but never a Penelope—never, Haswell, until last week.

*Penelope!*

Last week I found her. And where? Haswell, she lives within three doors of my own home. She had lived there all the time. She had seen me many times before my fateful night, and she had seen me often afterward—always walking the earth normally like other human beings, save for that one astounding evening. She was willing to talk, and glad to discuss my case; she is a highly intelligent girl, I may say. She has since told me that on that evening she believed me to be drunk. It amused her, but it did not frighten her. That is why she did not go for help; she believed it to be a drunken whim of mine to walk around on my hands, and that it would pass in its own time.

That, Haswell, is the story of my amazing connection with the star Penelope. You will understand that nearly fifty years must pass before it will again be in perihelion, and by that time, probably, I shall be dead.

I am very glad of it; one such experience is enough. Perhaps also you will understand that I would not have missed it that once for all the worlds in all the solar systems.

"I THINK your friend was right," I remarked, after a long silence. "You certainly were drunk, Raymond. Just as certainly as you are drunk tonight. Or did the whole thing happen tonight, as you went along?"

"Drunk?" he echoed. "Yes, I *am* drunk, Haswell—drunk with a diviner nectar than ever was brewed by man. Drunk with the wine of Penelope—the star Penelope. I have kept the best part of the story until the end. Next week Penelope and I are to be married. I am here tonight by her permission for a last bout with my old friend Haswell. It is my final jamboree. Congratulate me, Diccon!"

Of course, I congratulated him, and I did it sincerely; but the whole story still vastly puzzles me. Mrs. Raymond is a charming woman, and her name certainly is Penelope. But does that prove anything?

# Almost Broke, Youth Falls Co-Heir to $12,000,000

**HOWARD GIRARD, eighteen years old, had spent his last dime and was wondering where he could raise a bit of change. Then he got a job in a printing shop in Evanston, Illinois. And then, all at once, he got word that he had fallen co-heir to a $12,000,000 fortune left by his grand-uncle, Antoine Damange of Paris. Things like this have happened in romantic novels. They don't often happen in actual life. Howard, notified of his remarkable good fortune, said, "Well, that's pretty good," and then announced his intention of sticking to his job at the printing shop. His share of the estate will amount to about $2,000,000.**

# THE PURPLE HEART

## *The Story of a Haunted Cabin*

### *By* HERMAN SISK

I WAS WEARY of the fog that hung over me like a pall, fatigued to the point of exhaustion. Since early afternoon the chill wind had forced it through my clothing like rain. It depressed me.

The country through which I traveled alone was desolate and unpeopled, save here and there where some bush assumed fantastic form. The very air was oppressive. As far as I could see, were hills—nothing but hills and those bushes. Occasionally I could hear the uncanny cry of some hidden animal.

As I pushed on, a dread of impending disaster fastened itself upon me. I thought of my home, of my mother and sister, and wondered if all was well with them. I tried to rid myself of this morbid state of mind; but, try as I would, I could not. It grew as I progressed, until at length it became a part of me.

I had walked some fifteen miles, and was so weary I could scarcely stand, when I came suddenly upon a log cabin. It was a crude affair, quite small, and stood back some distance from the little-used road in a clump of trees. A tiny window and a door faced the direction from which I approached. No paint had ever covered the roughly-hewn logs from which it was made, and the sun and the wind and the fog had turned the virgin wood to a drab brown.

I felt it was useless to knock, for the cabin had every appearance of being deserted. However, rap I did. No voice bade me enter, and with an effort I pushed open the door and staggered into the house. Almost immediately my weary legs crumpled under me, and I toppled and struck heavily on my face.

When I regained consciousness, a rough room, scantily furnished, greeted my eye. There was an ill-looking table, the top of which was warped and rectangular in shape, standing in the center. To one side was a rustic chair. Beyond the table was a bunk built into the wall; and on this lay a man with shining eyes and a long, white beard. A heavy gray blanket covered all of him but his head.

"You're right on time," he said in a high-pitched voice.

I looked at him closely.

"I don't know you," I said.

"Nor I you; but I knew you would come."

"You are ill and need help?" I asked.

"No," he replied in his strange monotone. "But on this day some one always visits here. None has ever returned. But I have yet to be alone on the night of this anniversary."

There was something so weird in the way he looked at me out of those big, watery eyes that I involuntarily shuddered.

"What anniversary?" I asked.

"The murder of my father," he answered. "It happened many years ago. A strange man came to this cabin just as you have done."

He paused. I said nothing.

"You wish to stay all night?" he asked.

"Yes, if I may," I replied. A moment later I regretted it.

"Quite so," said he, with a slight nod of his white head. "Those were the very words he addressed to us. We took him in. When morning came I found my father dead in there," rolling his eyes and raising his head to indicate some point behind him, "with a dagger in his heart. You can see the room if you open the door behind me."

I looked at him a moment, hesitating. Then I went to the door and pushed it open. Cautiously glancing into the other room, I saw there was nothing there but a bunk similar to the one the old man occupied.

"Don't be afraid," he said, evidently sensing my fear. "Nothing will hurt you now. It's after midnight when it happens."

"What happens?" I asked.

"I don't know. No two men have the same experience. It all depends on one's state of mind."

"You mean—" I began.

"Yes," he interrupted. "One man saw hands reaching toward him and ropes in the air. He was escaping the gallows. Another saw faces of beautiful girls. He was on his way to a large church wedding. A third saw pools of blood and the white snow stained by human life. He was again living through a massacre in Russia."

"Do you live here?" I asked.

"No. No one does. The cabin is quite deserted. I come each year to welcome the evening's guest."

"Is there no other place to stay?" I asked, a sudden fear seizing me.

"None. Besides, it is growing dark without, and you would lose your way *even if you could leave.*"

There was something ominous in the way he uttered these last five words.

"Yes," he went on, as if I had asked the unuttered question in my mind, "you may think you can go, but you cannot. That is the curse my father placed on this cabin. And I come each year to see that his word is obeyed. Whoever enters that door yonder on this date must stay until morning, and endure the agonies that only the rising sun can dispel."

I looked about me to make sure that he and I were the only living things in the room.

"What is to prevent my leaving?" I asked.

"Try to," he replied, an eerie note of glee in his queer voice.

I walked to the door and gave it a mighty pull. To my utter amazement, it was locked!

I tried again, this time with greater determination; but the door remained unyielding. A sudden terror seized me. I turned to beseech the old man to let me go, but *he was not there!*

I looked quickly about me. He was nowhere to be seen. I ran into the other room. It was as empty as before. I rushed to the door there and pulled vigorously, but my efforts were in vain.

Returning to his bunk, I examined it closely. To my great astonishment, the heavy gray blanket was gone. In desperation I tried once more the door through which I had entered the cabin. It was still as inflexible as concrete.

Darkness fell fast and the room became very dim. I groped about and discovered some matches and a candle on a shelf under the table. I struck a match and lighted the candle. Letting some of the tallow drip onto the table, I made a

stick for it. I then sat down on the edge of the bunk and anxiously awaited developments. But nothing occurred to mar the somber silence of my prison.

Thus I remained until my watch pointed to the hour of nine. My journey had greatly fatigued me, but my fears counterbalanced my weariness, so that I kept awake in spite of it.

At length, however, my eyelids grew heavy; my eyes became bleary, so that the candle multiplied, and my head drooped until my chin rested on my chest.

Letting the candle burn, I lay back on the hard bunk. I was cold and very nervous, and greatly felt the need of food and dry clothing. But my fatigue soon overcame me and I fell asleep.

When I awakened, a sense of suffocation and bewilderment hung over me. Whereas the room had been cold when I lay down, it now seemed close and hot. I pulled myself to a sitting posture. The room was dark. The candle was out.

I jumped to my feet and started toward the table. But in another moment I stood frozen to the spot, my eyes arrested and my body palsied by what I saw before me.

AT THE far end of the room was a purple glow in the shape of a human heart. It was stationary when I saw it, but almost immediately it began to move about the room. Now it was at the window. Then beside the table. Again it moved quickly but silently into the other room.

I pulled my frightened senses together and groped my way to the table. I found a match. With trembling hands, I struck it and lit the candle. To my surprise, it was almost as tall as when I had fallen asleep. I looked at my watch. It was one o'clock.

A moment later the flame was snuffed out and I was again in total darkness. I looked wildly about me. Horrors! The purple heart was beside me! I shrank back in terror. It came closer.

Suddenly I acquired superhuman courage. I grasped for the spectre. I touched nothing. I placed my left hand before me at arm's length. *Lo!* it was between me and my hand!

Presently it moved away. A great calm settled over me and I began to sense a presence in the room. Now, without any fear and with steady hand, I again struck a match and lighted the candle. It was promptly extinguished. I struck another with similar results.

And now something brushed my lips and an arm was passed lightly about my shoulders, but I was no longer afraid. The room continued cozily warm, and a greater sense of peace came over me.

Presently I lay down again and watched the purple heart as it came toward me and took its place at the edge of the bunk, like some loved one sitting beside me.

I must have fallen asleep again, for I knew no more until broad daylight awakened me, and I found myself lying in the middle of the room. There was no fog. The sun was shining brightly, and a broad beam was streaming through the dusty window pane. The candle and the matches were no longer visible.

Suddenly I thought of the locked door. Springing to it, I gave a mighty pull. It opened easily!

I snatched my cap from the rough floor and hurried into the warm sunlight.

A short distance from me a man came trudging along. He was a powerful-looking fellow of middle age and was dressed in coarse working clothes.

"Do you know anything about that cabin?" I shouted, as we drew closer.

"Sure. It's haunted," he replied. He looked hard at me. "Were *you* in there last night?"

I related my experience.

"That's queer!" he muttered. "But I ain't surprised. Last night was the night."

"What night?" I demanded.

"Ten years ago an old man was murdered in that cabin, and his son swore on his deathbed he'd come back every anniversary and lure somebody into the cabin for the night and torture him."

He shuddered, his white face staring at the cabin.

"Come away!" he whispered. "Come away! It's haunted! It's haunted!"

# FELINE

## *A Whimsical Storiette*

## *By* Bruce Grant

MYRA looked up from her writing.

"David," she said, "I am positive I heard a cat outside."

The man only growled, settled himself deeper in his comfortable chair, and continued to read.

The giant breath of the blizzard rattled the windows. The snow flung itself wrathfully against the panes. Outside it was bitter cold.

"I can't bear to think of a cat outside on a night like this," continued Myra.

"Forget it!" exclaimed David, arousing himself. "You are continually thinking of cats. All that I hear from you is *cats*. You dream of cats, you occupy your mind with cats. I heard no cat crying outside. It is only your imagination."

"No; I heard a cat—I am sure," insisted Myra.

It was warm inside. David sat beneath a green-shaded reading lamp. The pyramid of light fell on his tall figure, attired in a dressing-gown and slippers, slouched comfortably in the chair.

Myra sat at a desk, scribbling in a book, now and then tapping her lips with her penholder. She wore a clinging, yellow negligée, and her hair was done back tightly on her head. In her sleek, brown coil of hair at the back there was a large Spanish comb.

"David, I *know* I heard a cat then!" she cried, throwing down her pen. "You surely must have heard it, too."

David laid down his book.

"When you are through dreaming of cats," he said, "I'll be able to read."

Myra rose.

"I cannot bear to think of a cat out on a night like this—a little homeless cat."

Then she walked from the room.

David mused. *Cats!* Nothing but cats! She had gone insane on the subject of cats. He had never known her to be so unreasonable about cats. She seemed worse since their cat, Rodolpho, had died. Her mind seemed now occu-

pied with nothing but cats. He was sure she had been writing something about cats in her book.

To prove his contention he walked to the desk. He picked up the small, leather-bound book. He read:

*"THE SNOWSTORM.*

*"Against the pane the snow*
*flakes press*
*Like dainty kitten paws.*
*Outside the chill wind stings*
*and cuts,*
*Like angry kitten claws."*

David laid the note-book down. There! He had been right. He strode back to his chair. Myra returned to the room.

"I looked out of the dining-room window," she said. "I could not see the cat. It is awful outside."

She paused.

"Cats are such unfortunate creatures. In fact, all animals are unfortunate—animals domesticated by man. They never know when their masters are going to turn against them, or at least ignore them."

"People treat cats that way because cats are good for nothing," David put in. "Cats enter your home, eat your food, roll up on your bed, and do nothing. Rat traps are better for catching rats and mice. You don't need cats in the scheme of things. They are worthless."

"Yes," added Myra softly, in a passionless voice. "A woman comes into your home, and eats your food, and spends your money, and curls up on your bed. A cook and a housekeeper can do better work than she."

"There is no comparison," cried David. "A woman at least shows you some affection—a cat never."

"A woman shows affection when she knows that it is wanted," Myra said in a distant voice.

There was an awkward silence. These arguments never came to anything. Why did they indulge in them? They always led to disagreeable subjects, or touched on the fatuity of marriage. No, such arguments never did any good. Far better if both remained silent. David picked up his book.

"Cats are very intelligent animals," Myra continued, half aloud. "They know instantly when they are not wanted. If anyone in a household hates a cat, there is no need of that person speaking gruffly or striking the cat. The cat will know. Cats have powers of divination which are denied most humans. They are such sensitive creatures. They respond to the least touch, the least kind thought. They slink away at the least unkind word, at the least unkind thought."

She hesitated, trifling with her pen.

"They know when they are not wanted. I should not be surprised if a cat would go out into the cold—on a night like this—if it knew it was not wanted."

"Stop such darn foolishness!" growled David.

Myra looked at him, raising her eyebrows quizzically.

"Please don't talk that way," she said.

For an instant there came over him a surge of hatred. Would she ever leave him alone! Alone for a few minutes of peaceful reading. Wasn't she contented to live quietly and peacefully without continually worrying herself about cats, and whether or not her husband still loved her.

She was talking:

"It is true I love cats. I have loved them all my life. They are the most beautiful and graceful of animals. But please forgive me if I hurt you by talking about them. They show me affection. They seem to know that I love them."

But David was not listening. He was thinking. She was like a cat. Her movements were catlike. Truly, she was every inch a cat. Come into your home, absorb your warmth, eat your food, taunt you, insist on being stroked and petted at every turn—truly a remarkable woman, as remarkable as those small animals she adored, David scowled.

Events tumbled over themselves in his mind. She was susceptible to men. When one caressed her with his voice she almost purred with pleasure. She loved those who flattered her. He had flattered her most and had won her. She now still expected all the flattery and little attentions which he had given her before. She could not "settle down." He felt that he exuded hate at that mo- He felt that at last his eyes were opened. ment.

Myra got up from her desk again.

"I'm going out into the back yard and see if I can find that kitty," she announced.

David could not read now. He sat silently in his chair, repressing the wrathful things that tried to force themselves from his lips. He heard Myra putting on her shoes.

She peeped in finally and smiled wistfully. He sat in the same spot. The back door closed softly.

David gradually began to grow calmer. He sat and waited. In the silent house, the quiet broken only by the rattling of the windows and the thudding of the snow against the glass, he began to look back over his married life.

They had been more or less happy during the three years. It would be hard to find another woman who would put up with his idiosyncrasies. What a fool he was! Myra was a wonderful woman, after all, the most wonderful in the world!

He walked to the back door and called out into the night. He rushed through the snow and the cutting wind. He returned and waited. The clock told off the long hours.

Then it came to him—Myra's words, "I should not be surprised if a cat would go out on a night like this—into the cold—if it knew it was not wanted. . . ."

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# Chicagoans to Live in the Air Fifty Years Hence

**FIFTY years from now Chicago's citizens will no longer be rooted to the ground, but will fly in the air like birds, according to Mrs. William J. Chalmers, who has been closely identified with the city's progress.**

**"As we overstepped the bounds between earth and water, so we will overstep that between earth and air," she declares. "Whether it will be through some simple device which we will attach to our shoulders or feet, or whether we will learn breath control so that we can literally swim through the air, I cannot say. Certainly in fifty years this will come to pass—that we will all own small aeroplanes, so perfected that it will be possible for us to alight on the window ledges of our apartments, whether they be ten or twenty stories high. Chicago will, fifty years hence, have become a seaport. Steamships will be run electricity and will attain tremendous speed. But steamers will be used for heavy loads and passenger travel will be by aeroplane."**

# TWO HOURS OF DEATH

## *A Ghost Story*

### *By* E. THAYLES EMMONS

*A FEW weeks ago, while looking over some old papers which I found in the desk of my deceased father, I chanced upon the following manuscript. Whether it is a true record of some adventure in my father's life, or a bit of fiction which he had at some time prepared for publication, I do not know; but I am inclined to believe that it is indeed a true narrative. I have ascertained that such a man as Felix Sayres actually did exist; that he was an intimate friend of my father, and that he died in the strange manner described in the manuscript; but further than that I know nothing. However, I submit the whole thing as I found it, without change.*

AS I picked up my morning paper, the first item to catch my eye was the following:

**DIES IN MADHOUSE**

**INMATE FOR THIRTY-FIVE YEARS DIES SUDDENLY.**

**Felix Sayres, aged 69 years, who has been an inmate of the Eastwood Asylum for the Insane for the past thirty-five years, was found dead in his cell yesterday morning. At one time he was a well-known scientist of this city, but at the age of thirty-four became hopelessly insane, and has since been confined in the asylum, of which he was, at the time of his death, the oldest inmate.**

Felix Sayres was my college chum, and in later years my closest friend, and now that he is dead I am at liberty to reveal the remarkable story concerning him, a part of which not even he has ever known, though a principal actor in the awful scene which has been indelibly stamped on my memory, haunting my waking hours and recurring to me in oft-repeated dreams.

My friend was a man of genius and ability, and had it not been for the terrible misfortune which came upon him, he would have become famous in the scientific world. Nearly all of his time, day and night, was given over to scientific research, in finding and working upon new hypotheses and bringing to light discoveries in that strange world into which he had evidently been born.

I was at that time his most intimate friend, and to me a great many of his hopes and secrets were confided. Many nights have I passed in his laboratory, listening to his explanation of some new theory, or aiding him in his experiments.

It was always a source of great pleasure to me thus to pass a portion of my time, although my mind was not of the same scientific trend as that of my friend. His theories were always so lucidly elaborated and so strong fundamentally that the most abstract of them seemed, even in the embryo, capable of actual demonstration, and so great was my confidence in him that I always stood ready to assist in any experiment or test.

At one point, however, I drew the line. Sayres, while none the less engaged with material subjects, was constantly dabbling in various psychical experiments with which I refused absolutely to have anything to do. The occult, I argued, should remain occult. Had it been intended that we should see beyond the things of this world the power would have been given us ages ago, I maintained, and the less one dealt with such unsolvable problems as vexed my friend the happier would be his life. Having no desire for knowledge of the supernatural, I studiously avoided all dealing with it, and it was tacitly understood, between Sayres and myself, that beyond the line of ordinary conversation the subject was forbidden. I knew, however, that for him the thing had great fascination and that my opinion did nothing to banish it from his mind.

At the time of which I write I had not seen Sayres for several weeks, as was often the case when he was deepest in his books and experiments. I had called at his laboratory, but his servant had said that no one was to be admitted, and I knew that it was useless to attempt to see him. At length I received a letter from him, saying that he had something of interest to disclose and urging me to "come tonight!"

When I arrived at my friend's laboratory I found him in a high state of nervous excitement, pacing back and forth like a caged tiger. He greeted me effusively, and with his usual directness, plunged at once into the matter at hand, which was evidently uppermost in his mind. Seating himself at the opposite side of the table and directly facing me, he began:

"Thornton, I want you to prepare yourself to hear of something that is to be entirely different from anything I have heretofore shown you. It is something that to mankind has always been vague, uncertain, unfathomable—something, in fact, that has existed only in imagination and in theory, but never in demonstration. I will show it to you tonight, and to the world tomorrow, in such a manner as entirely to revolutionize life and living, death and dying.

"As you very well know, my religious beliefs have always been skeptical; but my skepticism has arisen rather from insufficiency of faith with which to overcome the lack of direct evidence which mortals have concerning spiritual things than from stubborn unbelief. That there is a Supreme Being I have never doubted. His many works are too manifest, and it is impossible to conceive of such a creation as this earth and all its delicate mechanisms, and of the rest of the universe with all its unknown wonders, without some vast Supernatural oversight.

"Although I have never discussed the subject to any great extent, I have nursed it as a pet and secret hobby, and have spent many hours in work along certain lines in connection with it. In the beginning, I put finiteness aside from the question. The human mind, or soul, with its unlimited powers, has always been regarded by me as the most wonderful of all creations. I have been able to find no entirely satisfactory definition of this 'mind' from a purely physical standpoint, and therefore sought to obtain

one. Nobody will say that the soul is material; it belongs to the body and develops with it, but is no part of it.

"Life is but a taper, which a slight breath may easily puff out, but this indeterminable thing called 'mind,' I reasoned, must be governed by different laws. Is it possible that the Creator ruled that the greatest of all His works should be blotted out with the cessation of life in that sordid mass of clay, the body? Or did He arrange to reclaim it, together with its spiritual complement, to a world of its own, as men have for ages believed?

"Skeptic as I have been, I have always been willing to concede that the idea of a spiritual existence, while vague, seems no more wonderful than thousands of other things which we see about us daily, and for the reason that they are manifest, give them no thought whatever.

"As a basis for the theory which I set myself to formulate, I took what I shall term 'mind atoms.' As I have before said, we cannot regard the mind force as a material thing; but, as a contradictory fact, we know that it is *something*, and further than that generality we are ignorant. Then, as the mind force governs alike every portion of the body, this indeterminable something of which it is composed, I reasoned, must be in one portion as in another.

"I then placed these mind atoms as being diffused in the space occupied by the body and lying even between the atoms of its material composition. If, at death, this mind is merely withdrawn from the body—all of which I worked upon as already determined—would it not occupy in the spirit world the same space and retain the same shape of the human form from which it had fled?

"Then the idea suggested itself that if some powerful and undiscovered action could be produced (by the use of drugs, probably), causing an instantaneous and simultaneous separation of every mind atom from the physical atoms, the effect would be a spiritual death, while at the same time physical vitality would not be in the least impaired. I then went one step further and added the supposition that as the effects of the action wore away it would be possible for the soul to re-enter the body, even as it had been driven out, and creation would again be complete.

"I have worked untiringly, and wrought experiment after experiment, until at last I have succeeded in producing a drug that will accomplish all that I have explained to you. I have used it on various animals and have seen them recover from the effects of it, and thus have ascertained that it is harmless. I ventured to try it on myself, and I know that *I have certainly solved the mystery of the future*, although during the brief period in which my soul was in the spirit world I could make but few observations, and those of minor importance.

"I saw no other spiritual beings, but remained, for the most, close by my soulless body, waiting for the proper moment to return to my physical life, if it were indeed to be possible; but I am confident that what I have accomplished renders the unrevealed capable of being revealed and robs the hereafter of all its secrets."

HE PAUSED, and for a moment, so bewildered was I by the strangeness of it all, that I sat speechless, my brain in a whirl.

Thinking to overcome my amazement, I reached for the wine decanter, which was on the table before me, and into the glass nearest me I poured some of the strong wine which Sayres always kept at hand. After draining it, I looked up to see a gleam of satisfaction flit across his countenance.

"Thornton," said he, "in that glass of wine there was enough of the drug to render you temporarily dead for two hours, as I can best calculate. In five minutes you will be unconscious. I want you to undergo the same experience which I have safely passed through, so that we may later exchange ideas on the subject."

In spite of his assurance, a deadly fear took possession of me, and I swore and expostulated at his unfair treatment. With undisturbed calm, he again spoke to me, endeavoring to dispel my fears, and assuring me that he would be conversing with me again at the end of the two hours.

Even as he was speaking his words became indistinct, and an overpowering dizziness seized me. Then came a moment of which I have no recollection, after which, by the fact that I stood, or *seemed* to stand, within a few feet of the chair in which I had been seated, *gazing at myself*, even now in the same position, I knew that my body was without a soul, even as Sayres had said, and that I was the soul standing there!

I looked about me, and in place of the invisible atmosphere which I was accustomed to, the room seemed filled with a constantly moving, pulsating vapor, dense, gray and foglike, but through which I could discern objects with as much ease as ordinarily.

I saw my friend lift my body from the chair, lay it on a bench and place a cushion under the head. Then he began pacing to and fro, up and down, back and forth, and I found that I could move about at will and follow him.

I attempted to speak to him, but now there was no sound; I reached forth my hand to grasp a chair, but it offered no resistance, and I realized that I indeed occupied no space, but was nevertheless in space and a part of space. I saw my friend's lips move as though he were speaking. I heard no sound, but was able to understand his words, although he did not address me.

The glare of the lamps gave me a sensation which, had I been in my physical form, I should have termed pain, and I much preferred to keep in a dark corner. By a direct mental communication, of which I was not at the time aware, I was able to signify this fact to Sayres, and he at once turned out all the lights, leaving the laboratory lighted only by a low fire in the grate at the end of the room. I was then astonished to find that the absence of light had no effect upon my visual powers, and that I could see in the dark as well as before.

From this I drew the conclusion that in reality I possessed no visuality, as it seemed. My senses I had left behind with my physical self, and here they were replaced by a strange comprehension of everything about me. I still had the abilities which the senses convey, but their actual presence was lacking.

I could flit through the air with as much ease as I could walk on the floor, and could even have sunk through that same floor had I desired, for the most solid substance offered no resistance to my form. I was able to pass directly through anything.

The success of the experiment, up to this point, served to restore my confidence in Sayres and I entertained no doubt but that at the end of the stated time I could return to my body again. I therefore determined to lose no time in making all the observations possible.

Sayres was still pacing the room, and it was evident from his actions that in a large degree fear was the cause of his restlessness. He knew that in all probability I was constantly near him, and he would have avoided coming in contact with me had he been able to do so. Felix Sayres possessed courage beyond that of many men, but few mortals can be brought face to face with the supernatural without experiencing fear.

All of us have at various times—sometimes by day, but more often at night—undergone the feeling of the proximity of some ghostly presence, giving rise to a sensation of coldness and choking horror. This was clearly demonstrated to me now, for whenever myself

and Sayres came within a few feet of each other I could easily see that he felt my presence. He made no attempt to communicate with me and paid no heed to the various things I did to attract his attention.

After a little, he seemed to recover himself and calmly walked across the room to where my soulless body lay, and stood looking down at it. By the gleam in his eyes, and by my wonderful supernatural power of comprehension, I knew in an instant that overwork and nervous strain had at last done their work, that the cord of reason had snapped and that my friend was a madman!

His lips moved and I heard him, or rather *felt* him, address my body:

"At last I have you in my power! I have waited long for this moment, and at last my waiting is to be rewarded. I have driven the soul from the body, and the body lives; but now I will take away life itself, and you will be dead!"

The word seemed to please him, and he murmured slowly:

"Dead, *dead!*"

I HEARD him continue in his madness:

"It is you who have stolen the honors due me; it is you who would prevent me from becoming famous; it is you, curse you, who will marry the only woman I can ever love—and then you ask me to let you live! No, damn you!"

He then took from a drawer nearby a large and peculiarly-shaped dissecting knife which I had often seen him use, and, with the deliberation of the insane, he proceeded to sharpen it on a steel, testing it from time to time with his thumb.

In my overpowering fear for the safety of my physical self, I know not all that I did, but I do know that it was all in vain. How I longed for the power of speech! And what would I not have given for the use of my own strong body with which to cope with him!

But I was utterly in his power and at his mercy, and the sickening thought came to me that I, the spirit, must stand passive by his side and see my body, still living, hacked and mutilated by the knife he held. I called for help, but knew there was no sound, and in despair I waited.

I heard the madman that was once my friend mutter: "That will do," and, with the gleaming blade in his hand, he started across the room, and I knew that the awful moment was at hand.

I attempted to grapple with him, but my hands felt nothing. Another step and he would be at the bench and it would all be over. Instinctively, I threw myself between the madman and my body, with my arms stretched forth as if to keep him away. How it was accomplished I cannot tell, but by the look of mortal terror that came in the face before me, such as I have never since seen drawn in any countenance, I knew that I had *become visible* and that he saw me!

I can imagine the picture at this moment—the spirit guarding the helpless counterpart of itself—and indeed it must have been a tableau to have struck fear to the stoutest heart. My friend's eyes dilated with horror; the knife dropped from his hand.

One moment thus he stood. Then his lips parted, and I knew that he had uttered a shriek. He then fell at my feet, blood flowing from his mouth and nostrils, his eyes rolling in terror.

I remained chained to the spot by the fear that he would recover from his fit and carry out his fiendish intention.

At length the same feeling of dizziness, which I had before experienced, returned to me, and almost before I could realize what was taking place I found myself sitting upright on the bench, body and soul again united, and the form of Sayres at my feet, to convince me that all was not a hideous dream.

I placed my poor friend on the bench, and finally I succeeded in bringing him back to consciousness, but in a very weak condition.

He passed through a very severe illness, but never regained his sanity. He remained hopelessly insane.

Of this awful story I have related he never recollected any part. I was unable to find any of the wonderful drug in his laboratory, and am as ignorant of its composition now as I was on that terrible night. I have been silent on the matter, hoping that some day Sayres would again regain his reason, but now that he is dead I have been impelled to write this narrative.

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# Neurotic Women Have Queer Mania

**THE astonishing fraud perpetrated by Evelyn Lyons of Escanaba, Michigan, who, with the aid of a hot water bottle, fooled the doctors into believing that she had a fever of 118 degrees, is not without precedent. She was the victim of an odd mania that often seizes abnormal women who crave wide notoriety. Doctors and psychologists have long been acquainted with this strange caprice of neurotic women, but it is rarely that one maintains the fake illness for as long a time as did Miss Lyons, who set the nation's medical fraternity in a tempest of learned discussion before her sham was discovered.**

**This erratic desire to be an object of curiosity often takes other forms, as in the case of Mary Ellen MacDonald of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, who, in order to attract attention, turned herself into a "spook." By starting mysterious fires around her home, walking stealthily through the farmhouse at night and slapping the faces of sleeping persons, rapping on the walls and so forth, she contrived to spread a feeling of dread throughout the countryside. The superstitious country folk were sure that the house was haunted, and as Miss MacDonald carried her hoax still further—sending weird radio messages, tying knots in the tails of cows, attiring herself in ghostly gowns and fleeing across the moonlit fields—the fear of disembodied spirits spread rapidly, and the uncanny "manifestations" became a matter of nation-wide discussion.**

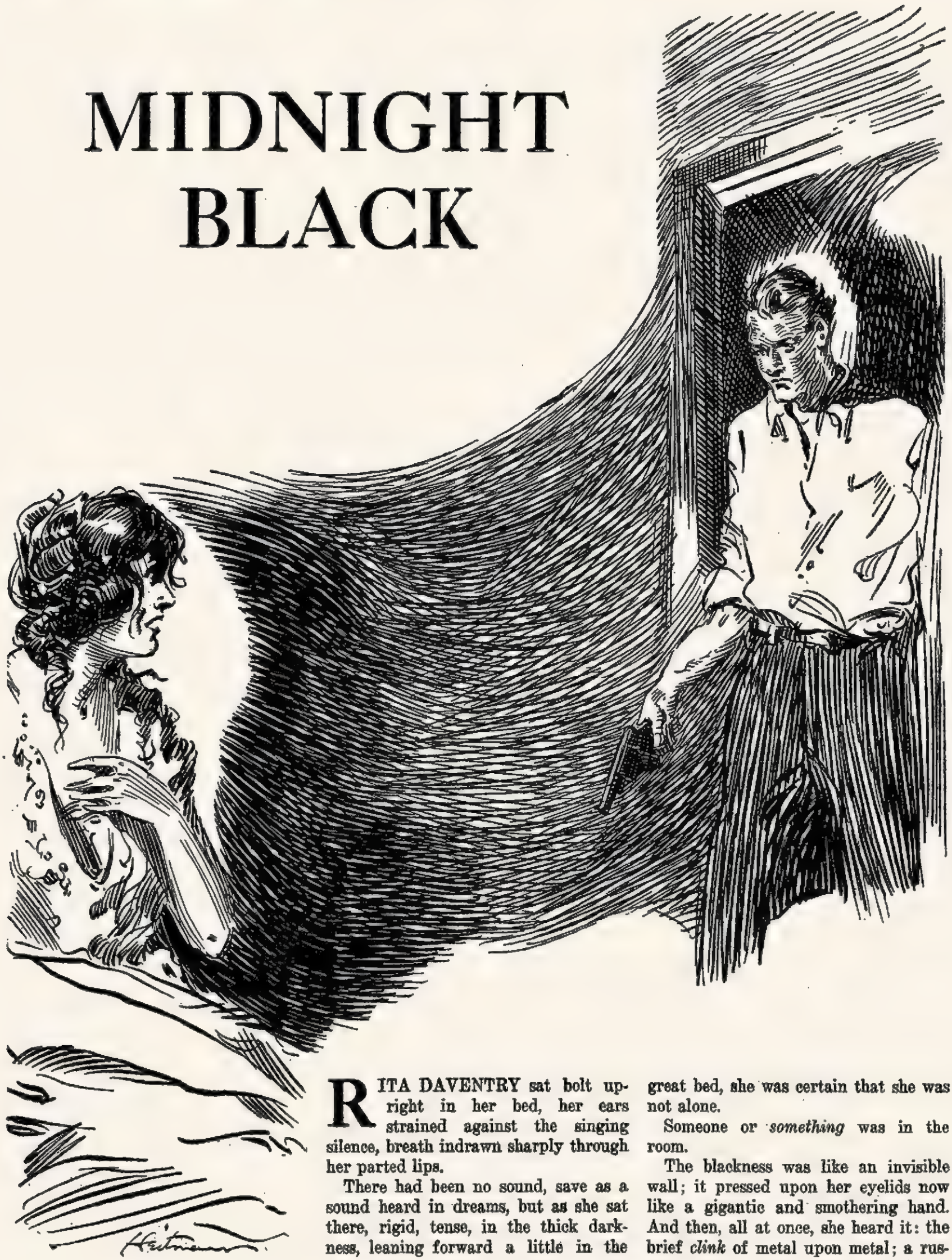
**Spiritualists, mediums, and others journeyed to Antigonish, and, after watching the unearthly "phenomena," were unanimously agreed that a spirit, or spirits, had returned to haunt the community.**

**Then Dr. Walter Prince of the Psychical Research Society went there, investigated the "ghost" more thoroughly, and traced all the terrifying happenings to Mary Ellen MacDonald.**

**Meanwhile, however, Miss MacDonald—like Miss Lyons, the "fever girl"—had gratified her craving for notoriety.**

*HAMILTON CRAIGIE Spins Another Yarn in His Inimitable Style*

# MIDNIGHT BLACK



RITA DAVENTRY sat bolt upright in her bed, her ears strained against the singing silence, breath indrawn sharply through her parted lips.

There had been no sound, save as a sound heard in dreams, but as she sat there, rigid, tense, in the thick darkness, leaning forward a little in the great bed, she was certain that she was not alone.

Someone or *something* was in the room.

The blackness was like an invisible wall; it pressed upon her eyelids now like a gigantic and smothering hand. And then, all at once, she heard it: the brief *clink* of metal upon metal; a rus-

tle, like the flicker of a wind-blown leaf.

Simply by reaching forth her hand she could have pressed the wall switch, flooded that midnight blackness with the blazing effulgence of the electrolier, but she could not. Eyes strained against that velvet black, she crouched now, in the immensity of the great bed, the silken ease of the sheets turned suddenly to ice, her pulses hammering to the tension of her hard-held breathing, there in the stifling dark.

There came a clanking, a whirring as of wings invisible; then, from the wall clock, there boomed twelve heavy strokes—midnight.

She heard the slow *tick-tock* of that steady beat, and then, of a sudden she heard something else: the muffled ticking of a watch.

The sound was not loud—it came to her as through walls of silence—but it was nearer now. She was certain of it.

The door was closed; it was a heavy, sound-proof affair; the intruder, whoever he might be, had entered by the window. Rita Daventry knew that he was armed, and desperate—desperate with the cold courage of a cornered grizzly; a housebreaker, who, if attacked, would shoot his way out, reckless of consequences. To such a man, murder, as the price of his liberty, would be a little thing.

And with the thought she stiffened; her mouth opened, to release the scream, at the first sound of which she knew that aid would come, unthinking, swift, reckless, too, in its first fury of intrepid action.

But she would not summon that scream.

On the floor above, her husband was working now in his laboratory. But the man below would have the advantage of that midnight black; with the opening of the door, he would shoot him down with the ruthless, cold cruelty of a wolf.

But that was not all the reason. To Rita Daventry, alone now with this invisible menace of the dark, there had come, on a sudden, a thought to freeze her blood, the thought of Ronald Armitage.

It had been only the night before, at a studio tea, that Armitage had made the threat, or the promise, that came to her now with a sudden, cold prevision of tragedy. Armitage was young, reckless, debonair, of an engaging manner with women; and Rita had encouraged him—well, just a little, she told herself.

It was a fascinating game—in the playing. The paying—that would be another matter. And as if the words had been spoken in her ear, she was hearing now the smooth voice, thickened a trifle with his potations, with that faintly roughened, passionate undertone:

". . . .Daventry doesn't care, does he? Why should *you?* I tell you, Rita, you've gotten into my blood. Some night *between you and me*—the witching hour, ha? I *promise* you I'll be there; and you won't have to *look* to find me!"

The handsome, dissipated face had come close to hers; there had been a menace in the tone, as well as a caress. And the fact that the man had been—well—not himself could not condone. The noise, the lights, the music upon which, dancing together, they had floated as on a languorous, steep wave of sound and motion, could not condone.

Rita had had no excuse save the oft-repeated, sophisticated sophistry of "The last time; this will be the very last!" And she had gone on, protesting, if at all, with a half-mutinous, wholly unconsidered coquetry, which, at the last, had led to this!

RONALD ARMITAGE had the reputation of being something of a "blood;" the Armitages had sowed and reaped, and of young Ronald it was said that he would stop at nothing for the accomplishment of his desires.

And now, alone in that vast bed, hearing again that stealthy movement by the window, the girl checked again sharply in the act of reaching forth her hand. With her finger upon the button, she froze, rigid, as that smooth, stealthy advance moved closer.

There came a fumbling at the footboard; she heard the sound, like a faint, rubbing whisper, of naked fingers sliding upon polished wood. But the night was a moonless, black emptiness; the bed-chamber was like a tomb for blackness, dark as a wolf's throat, and yet alive with movement, wiith a tension drawn like a fine wire and singing at a pitch too low for sound.

At any moment, too, Daventry might come down; he was a careful man who guarded his house and the treasure therein with a meticulous observance. And sitting there, waiting, nerves at pitch, Rita Daventry tasted to the full the fruits of her single indiscretion. As between Armitage and her husband, she knew now beyond peradventure whom it was she loved, and with a love, as she knew now, fierce and protective, desirous above all things of the safety—the life, indeed, of the toiler on the second floor.

Armitage had never been in her bedchamber, of course, although he knew its location, had seen it, from the outside, walking with Daventry through the corridor without. But in the darkness strange tricks are played with one's sense of direction. The room was a large one, lofty, high-ceilinged, its rear windows opening upon a service alley, and it had been by means of this alley that the midnight intruder had made entrance.

She could hear him now a little better—his breathing, hard-held and yet rising to that peculiar, sterterous quality that was almost like a snuffling, a quick, eager panting as of a hound questing his quarry in the dark. If Armitage had been drinking—but then, he must have been, or he would scarcely have made good his threat.

Daventry, though a studious, careful man, was a lion when aroused; he could shoot and shoot straight. And if the two should meet, there in that midnight black, it would be grim tragedy for one, or both—tragedy with none for witness save that pale girl new-risen from her couch of dreams, wide-eyed, her gaze fixed now in a sightless staring upon the black well of the night.

And then, as she shrank backward against the pillows, there came a thumping clatter, a thick, whispered oath, and a following silence that was more terrible than any sound.

He was coming now, around the footboard, along the side of the bed. She felt rather than heard that fumbling, stealthy advance; the fingers feeling along the counterpane; the noiseless *pad-pad* of the feet deadened by the thick pile of the Kermanshah rug; in imagination she could almost see the face, flushed now, bemused with drink, the leering, parted mouth. . . .

The scream, lodged in her throat now, seemed like a bird beating against bars; in a moment the silence would be ripped from end to end, as a sheet is ripped from point to point, with the tearing impact of that scream, rising heavenward with the first defiling touch of those groping fingers. Armitage's face on that evening had been the face of a satyr, high-colored, the nose sharpened to a point of greed, the eyes in a wide, avid staring upon the perfect curve of her shoulders, her neck.

And she had encouraged him with byplay of hand and eye, speech in a low rich contralto dealing in double meanings that yet had no meaning; glance provocative plumbing the depths of his—for this.

And in that moment Rita Daventry knew fear; the primal fear of the wo-

man whose very protection has become her peril—the peril of the abyss.

And it was then that she heard it, like a summons of doom; the sound of heavy footsteps from the room above.

THE footsteps were coming down now; they beat hollowly against the iron treads of the staircase with rapid thunder.

Robert Daventry was coming, leaping downward, now to meet—the death that waited for him behind that closed door, or to deal it to the man who, somewhere in that smothering dark, crouched, automatic ready, waiting for the man who was coming—on the wings of death.

After all, her husband might not have heard that thumping clatter; all unknowing, he might be rushing downward to meet an ambush unsuspected and unknown. And that Armitage would shoot, the woman was convinced. For he would put but one construction upon that headlong descent. Daventry had heard him, knew that he was there, like a thief in the night, a marauder, an outlaw meriting the swift justice of the bullet.

And then, all at once, the steps ceased; a silence grew and held that was like the silence before storm, so that to the woman upon the bed it seemed that she abode in a vacuum of sound and silence, brooding upon the night in a volcanic, breathless calm.

It must be a nightmare that would pass, a waking dream that would presently dissolve in the sanity of peaceful slumber. She strove, as a drowning swimmer fathoms deep in dreams, to scream a warning, a command to the man—*her* man—silent now upon the threshold of life, or of death. But she could not.

And presently, how she could not have told, she knew that, where before there had been but *one* dim Presence in that bed-chamber, now there were *two*.

She had heard nothing, seen nothing, felt nothing; neither the opening nor the closing of the heavy door; no faintest sound of breathing; the silence held, borrowing a tension from the electric air. Remote, as through many thicknesses of walls, there came to her now, as from a world removed, the night noises of the City, muted by distance to a vague shadow of clamor, faint and far.

But that velvet black before her was, as she knew, most terribly endowed with motion, sinister, alive, awaiting merely the spark, the pressure of rigid finger upon trigger, the touch of hand against hand, the faintest whisper of a sound, to dissolve in a chaos of red ruin—and with it the ruin of her world.

Abruptly, again she heard that muffled ticking, this time close at hand, and with it, as she fancied, the faint breathing of a man. But even as she heard it, it receded, died; there came the faint *snick* of metal upon metal, like the *snick* and slither of a steel blade; it was followed by a sort of chugging impact, like the sound made by a knife sheathed home, say, at the base of a man's brain, or between the shoulders—a sound to freeze the blood.

That Armitage could have been capable of this she could not believe, but upon the instant her flesh crawled abruptly at the thought; of the invisible duelists but one remained now, and he was coming toward her; she fancied she could hear the faint, scarce-audible footfall on the thick pile of the rug.

And then—the silence was abruptly broken by a shattering crash. The intruder, unfamiliar with the room's interior, had swept a great vase from the mantel.

And then, distinct and clear, she heard the sodden impact of fist on flesh, a heaving grunt, the lift and strain of heavy bodies, close-locked.

And following this, in a sudden fury, all round the room the pictures rattled in their frames; the flooring shook; a heavy desk went over in a smashing ruin; grunts followed it, the straining shock of big men in a death-grapple. But mostly it was a fight in silence and darkness, with the quick, hard breathing of men at the last desperate urge of their spent strength.

With her finger again upon the light-switch, again she hesitated, and in that flash of time she heard all at once a quick, sobbing breath—a groan—then silence.

Somewhere out there in that midnight blackness her husband might be lying wounded—dead—above him the beast whom she had known as Ronald the Debonair, turning his face now toward the girl who, shivering and defenseless, crouched forlorn upon the bed.

But even as this fresh terror out of the dark assailed her, there came a heavy crash—another—the barking rattle of an automatic, the quick flashes stabbing into the murk to right and left.

The roaring crashes beat upon her ears like a tocsin of doom, and then, in answer, three answering shots, deliberate, slow. With them there came the slumping fall of a heavy body, and the labored breathing of a man.

The duel was over.

For a moment the silence held. Dreading what the coming of the light might reveal, her finger, hovering upon the push-button, came away; then, with an agony of effort, made a darting thrust.

And as the light sprang to full flower she looked with white face and staring eyes, upon the tall figure in the doorway.

It was Robert Daventry!

BUT her hysterical, glad cry was stifled in her throat as her husband, bending forward over the rug, turned over the dead man with his foot.

Fearful, yet eager to see, she rose upon her knees, peering with wide eyes over the foot-board.

Then—hysteria seized her with, by turns, a sudden storm of mingled weeping and frantic laughter.

"That. . . . *That*. . . .!" she cried, pointing a shaking finger at the still figure on the carpet.

And then:

"Oh, my God! . . . . it might have been—!"

But Daventry, gazing with a grim face at the rigid figure of the housebreaker—the unclean skin, with its bristly stubble of unshaven chin, blue now under the lights—thought it merely the natural reaction of the terrific strain which she had undergone.

"You mean—it might have been—*me!*" he said slowly. "Well—of course. . . ."

"Of course, Dear," lied Rita Daventry, with a misty smile.

## Mummies Made by Electricity

**R. F. McCAMPBELL, a Chicago undertaker, claims he has invented a process of embalming a dead body so that it will last forever. For twelve years Mr. McCampbell has been working on his process, and he now exhibits a modern mummy, lying in grandeur in an elaborate coffin, as proof that he has succeeded. By dehydrating a body with electricity, he says, its natural expression, even its complexion, may be preserved for ages.**

**"In the dehydration process performed by the Egyptians," said Mr. McCampbell, "the body was buried in the sand for seventy days. Then linen was wrapped about the corpse to prevent reabsorption of water and the body was placed away in a tomb. Through the electrical process the body will retain its lifelike appearance. It will be particularly valuable for preserving the bodies of great men so that future generations may see them as lifelike as the day they died."**

# MASTERPIECES OF WEIRD FICTION

## *No. 1—The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain*

### *By* BULWER LYTTON

A FRIEND of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest, "Fancy! since we last met I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London."

"Really haunted—and by what?—ghosts?"

"Well, I can't answer that question; all I know is this: six weeks ago my wife and I were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, 'Apartments, Furnished.' The situation suited us; we entered the house, liked the rooms, engaged them by the week—and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer; and I don't wonder at it."

"What did you see?"

"Excuse me; I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer—nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an indefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strange marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife, silly woman though she be—and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said dryly, 'I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger. Few ever stayed a second night; none before you a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.'

"'They—who?' I asked, affecting to smile.

"'Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I do not mind them. I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don't care,—I'm old, and must die soon anyhow; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.' The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her further. I paid for my week, and too happy were my wife and I to get off so cheaply."

"You excite my curiosity," said I; "nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously."

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight toward the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up—no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighboring areas, said to me, "Do you want any one at that house, sir?"

"Yes, I heard it was to be let."

"Let!—why, the woman who kept it is dead—has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J—— offered ever so much. He offered mother who chars for him, £1 a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not."

"Would not!—and why?"

"The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her."

"Pooh! You speak of Mr. J——. Is he the owner of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"In G—— Street, No.—."

"What is he? In any business?"

"No, sir—nothing particular; a single gentleman."

I gave the potboy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J——, in G—— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J—— at home—an elderly man with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted—that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation; that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. "Sir," said Mr. J——, with great courtesy, "the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question—the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day, though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character. The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse; for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner's inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighborhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take

charge of the house, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent free for a year to anyone who would pay its rates and taxes."

"How long is it since the house acquired the sinister character?"

"That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of, said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is, that my life has been spent in the East Indies, and in the civil service of the Company. I returned to England last year, on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, among whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repairing it, added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles—advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel on half pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants; they all left the house the next day; and, although each of them declared that he had seen something different from that which had scared the others, a something still was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, nor even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement. Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories—to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please."

"Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?"

"Yes, I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add, that I advice you *not* to pass a night in that house."

"My interest *is* exceedingly keen," said I; "and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them—even in a haunted house."

Mr. J—— said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, gave them to me—and, thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home, I summoned my confidential servant—a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as anyone I could think of.

"F——," said I, "you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there tonight. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or heard—something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?"

"Oh, sir, pray trust me," answered F——, grinning with delight.

"Very well; then here are the keys of the house—this is the address. Go now—select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire, air the bed well—see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger—so much for my weapons; arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen."

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honor. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. I selected one of the volumes of Macaulay's Essays. I though to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely toward the haunted house. I took with me a favorite dog: an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull terrier,—a dog fond of prowling about strange, ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats; a dog of dogs for a ghost.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms,—in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms,—a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor,—a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself. This last was a small room with a sofa bed, and had no communication with the landing place,—no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard without locks, flush with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards,—only hooks to suspend female dresses, nothing else; we sounded the walls,—evidently solid, the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then still accompanied by F——, went forth to complete my reconnoiter. In the landing place there was another door; it was closed firmly. "Sir," said my servant, in surprise, "I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for—"

Before he had finished his sentence, the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both,—some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small, blank, dreary room without furniture; a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner; a small window; the shutters closed; not even a fireplace; no other door but that by which we had entered; no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing round, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened; we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of indefinable horror. Not so my servant. "Why, they don't think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my foot."

"Try first if it will open to your hand," said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, "while I unclose the shutters and see what is without."

I unbarred the shutters,—the window looked on the little back yard I have before described; there was no ledge without,—nothing to break the sheer descent of the wall. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F——, meanwhile, was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that far from evincing any superstitious terrors, his nerve, composure, and even gayety amidst circumstances so extraordinary, compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest kick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain. As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor, and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landing place. We both saw a large, pale light—as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial—move before us, and ascend the stairs that led from the landing into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered, to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid, rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it,—a half-tester, such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in a rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping room. I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers: there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing, —nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a pattering footfall on the floor, just before us. We went through the other attics (in all four), the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen—nothing but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand; just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint, soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bedchamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire, and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters, and while I read them, my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him to bring, took them out, placed them on a table close at my bed head, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

The letters were short,—they were dated; the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage, indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting were those of a man imperfectly educated, but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough, wild love; but here and there were dark unintelligible hints at some secret not of love,—some secret that seemed of crime. "We ought to love each other," was one of the sentences I remember, "for how everyone else would execrate us if all was known." Again: "Don't let anyone be in the same room with you at night,—you talk in your sleep." And again: "What's done can't be undone; and I tell you there's nothing against us unless the dead could come to life." Here there was underlined in a better handwriting (a female's), "They do!" At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had written these words: "Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as——"

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents.

Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of marvelous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself; laid the letters on the table; stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering; and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough till about half past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the door between the two rooms. Thus alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bed head. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay. Opposite to me the fire burned clear; and on the hearth rug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing place, must have got open; but no,—it was closed. I then turned my glance to my left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table,—softly, softly; no visible hand,—it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other; I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked round the floor,—no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bed head: my servant called out, "Is that you, sir?"

"No; be on your guard."

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backward and forward. He kept his eyes fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentered all my attention on himself. Slowly he rose up, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room; and if ever I saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognized him had we met in the street, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying, in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, "Run, run! it is after me!" He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open, and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing involuntarily, calling him to stop; but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters, and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street door open,—heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

It was but for a moment that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I reëntered my room, closing the door after me, and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again

carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one,—not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How, then, had the THING, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened upon the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing himself close against it, as if literally striving to force his way into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would certainly have bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognize me. Whoever has seen at the Zoological Gardens a rabbit, fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as in the madness of hydrophobia, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay.

Perhaps, in order not to appear seeking credit for a courage, or rather a coolness, which the reader may conceive I exaggerate, I may be pardoned if I pause to indulge in one or two egotistical remarks.

As I hold presence of mind, or what is called courage, to be precisely proportioned to familiarity with the circumstances that lead to it, so I should say that I had been long sufficiently familiar with all experiments that appertain to the marvelous. I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world,—phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is that the supernatural is the impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of Nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, "So, then, the supernatural is possible;" but rather, "So, then, the apparition of a ghost is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of Nature,—that is, not supernatural."

Now, in all that I had hitherto witnessed, and indeed in all the wonders which the amateurs of mystery in our age record as facts, a material living agency is always required. On the Continent you will find still magicians who assert that they can raise spirits. Assume for the moment that they assert truly, still the living material form of the magician is present; and he is the material agency by which, from some constitutional peculiarities, certain strange phenomena are represented to your natural senses.

Accept, again, as truthful, the tales of spirit manifestation in America,—musical or other sounds; writings on paper, produced by no discernible hand; articles of furniture moved without apparent human agency; or the actual sight and touch of hands, to which no bodies seem to belong,—still there must be found the MEDIUM, or living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs. In fine, in all such marvels, supposing even that there is no imposture, there must be a human being like ourselves by whom, or through whom, the effects presented to human beings are produced. It is so with the now familiar phenomena of mesmerism or electro-biology; the mind of the person operated on is affected through a material living agent. Nor, supposing it true that a mesmerized patient can respond to the will or passes of a mesmerizer a hundred miles distant, is the response less occasioned by a material being; it may be through a material fluid—call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will—which has the power of traversing space and passing obstacles, that the material effect is communicated from one to the other. Hence, all that I had hitherto witnessed, or expected to witness, in this strange house, I believe to be occasioned through some agency or medium as mortal as myself; and this idea necessarily prevented the awe with which those who regard as supernatural things that are not within the ordinary operations of Nature, might have been impressed by the adventures of that memorable night.

As, then, it was my conjecture that all that was presented, or would be presented to my senses, must originate in some human being gifted by constitution with the power so to present them, and having some motive so to do, I felt an interest in my theory which, in its way, was rather philosophical than superstitious. And I can sincerely say that I was in as tranquil a temper for observation as any practical experimentalist could be in awaiting the effects of some rare, though perhaps perilous, chemical combination. Of course, the more I kept my mind detached from fancy, the more the temper fitted for observation would be obtained; and I therefore riveted eye and thought on the strong daylight sense in the page of my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light,—the page was overshadowed. I looked up, and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe.

It was a Darkness shaping itself forth from the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than to anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I cannot say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I fancied that I distinguished them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half believed, half doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak,—my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself, "Is this fear? It is *not* fear!" I strove to rise,—in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition,—that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond man's, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of man.

And now, as this impression grew on me,—now came, at last, horror, horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said, "This is horror; but it is not fear; unless I fear I cannot be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion,—I do not fear." With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand toward the weapon on the table; as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles,—they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame

seemed very gradually withdrawn; it was the same with the fire,—the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness. The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, of I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these, "I do not fear, my soul does not fear"; and at the same time I found strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows; tore aside the curtain; flung open the shutters; my first thought was—LIGHT. And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas lamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially—but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone,—except that I could yet see a dim shadow, which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover,—an old mahogany round table) there rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person, lean, wrinkled, small too,—a woman's hand. That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table; hand and letters both vanished. There then came the same three loud, measured knocks I had heard at the bed head before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many colored,—green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither as tiny Will-o'-the-Wisps, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a shape,—a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life,—ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange, mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long, yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned toward me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I though I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow,—eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape, equally distinct, equally ghastly,—a man's shape, a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress (for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable,—simulacra, phantasms); and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpselike aspect and ghostlike stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was blood stain on the breast of the female; and the phantom male was leaning on its phantom sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up,—they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of an aged woman. In her hand she held letters,—the very letters over which I had seen *the* Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, and then she opened the letters and seemed to read; and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned,—bloated, bleached, seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse; and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable, squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth,—hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth, and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow,—malignant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them: larvæ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water,—things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other; forms like naught ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings. Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold, soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentered all my faculties in the single focus of resisting stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow; above all, from those strange serpent eyes,—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in naught else around me, I was aware that there was a WILL, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvæ grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly, as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him—no movement; I approached—the animal was dead; his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire. I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favorite—acute self-reproach; I accused

myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken. Had this been done in the dark? Must it not have been by a hand human as mine; must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance—my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn, nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since—that is, it will go in a strange, erratic way for a few hours, and then come to a dead stop; it is worthless.

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Not till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression—for which I could not account—that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena, if I may use the term, which had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floors, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runnaway servant there; but he had not presented himself, nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool to this effect:

"Honored Sir:—I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think that I deserve it, unless—which Heaven forbid!—you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails tomorrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing now but start and tremble, and fancy IT is behind me. I humbly beg you, honored sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due me, to be sent to my mother's, at Walworth.—John knows her address."

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My belief in my own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hack cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs, I heard the same footfalls in advance. On leaving the house. I went to Mr. J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared; and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered, "I am but little acquainted with the woman's earlier history, except as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died—you smile—what would you say?"

"I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency."

"What! you believe it is all an imposture? For what object?"

"Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake,—tell you what money you had in your pocket, nay, describe your very thoughts,—it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me my previous *rapport*."

"But if a mesmerizer could so affect another living being, can you suppose that a mesmerizer could also affect inanimate objects: move chairs,—open and shut doors?

"Or impress our senses with the belief in such effects,—we never having been *en rapport* with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism, and superior to it,—the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against Nature,—it would be only a rare power in Nature which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such a power might extend over the dead,—that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain,—and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the SOUL, and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth, to make itself apparent to our senses, is a very ancient though obsolete theory upon which I will hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural. Let me illustrate what I mean from an experiment which Paracelsus describes as not difficult, and which the author of the 'Curiosities of Literature' cites as credible: A flower perishes; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither; you can never discover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burned dust of that flower, raise a spectrum of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with the human being. The soul has as much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon of the dead form. Hence, like the best-attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be soul,—that is, of

superior emancipated intelligence. These apparitions come for little or no object,—they seldom speak when they do come; if they speak, they utter no ideas above those of an ordinary person on earth. American spirit seers have published volumes of communications, in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrious dead: Shakespeare, Bacon,—Heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly not a whit of higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare, and Plato said and wrote when on earth. Nor, what is more noticeable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore, as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy to deny,— namely, nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether, in so doing, tables walk of their own accord, or fiendlike shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodiless hands rise and remove material objects, or a Thing of Darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood,—still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those constitutions may produce chemic wonders,—in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these may produce electric wonders. But the wonders differ from Normal Science in this,—they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results; and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator; and I believe unconsciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason: no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing. Well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty, it would surely be for some definite end. These phenomena belong to neither class; my persuasion is, that they originate in some brain now far distant; that that brain had no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semisubstance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe; some material force must have killed my dog; the same force might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog,—had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog,—that is fearful! Indeed it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?"

"Yes, though imperfectly,—and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house, the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house?"

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small, unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied, forms a starting point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls open, the floor removed,—nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small backyard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think, if I did that——"

"You would cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operations."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest allow me to write to you."

About ten days after I received a letter from Mr. J——, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious inquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters) she had married, against the wish of her relations, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child of about six years old. A month after the marriage the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any other verdict than that of "found drowned."

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child,—and in event of the child's death the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterwards,—it was supposed to have been neglected and, ill-treated. The neighbors deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape; crept out into the back yard; tried to scale the wall; fallen back exhausted; and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder; and the aunt and her husband had sought to pallate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune. Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterwards. The widow was left in affluence, but reverses of various kinds had befallen her: a bank broke; an investment failed; she went into a small business and became insolvent; then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work,—never long retaining a place, though nothing decided against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J—— had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had

rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J—— added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house,—we went into the blind, dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trapdoor, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some moldering furniture,—three chairs, an oak settle, a table,—all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest of drawers against the wall, in which we found, half rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank; costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court dresses, a handsome court sword; in a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colorless, volatile essences, of the nature of which I shall only say that they were not poisons,—phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock crystal, and another of amber,—also a loadstone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colors most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be somewhat advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight. It was a remarkable face,—a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey: the width and flatness of frontal; the tapering elegance of contour disguising the strength of the deadly jaw; the long, large terrible eyes, glittering and green as the emerald,—and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power.

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1765. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Withinside the lid were engraved, "Marianna to thee. Be faithful in life and in death to——." Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of a double murder within his own house,—that of his mistress and his rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J——, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found gread difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts, till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small, thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid,—on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round; but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A peculiar but not strong nor displeasing odor came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterwards discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odor, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room,—a creeping, tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilled; the saucer was broken; the compass rolled to the end of the room, and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trapdoor; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet; it was bound in plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus: "On all that it can reach within these walls, sentient or inanimate, living or dead, as moves the needle, so works my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burned the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it. He had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints.

## WOMAN'S SPIRIT IS PHOTOGRAPHED

**BEFORE her death, Mrs. Mary McVickers of Los Angeles requested that a photographer be commissioned to take photographs of her body as it lay in the casket. Accordingly, after she died, C. H. Monroe, a licensed photographer, entered the room where her body lay and prepared to obey her dying wish. In making the pictures, he used a velour screen to balance the light; and later he was amazed to find on this screen three weird impressions that are declared to be "spirit photographs." Monroe declared the screen was the sort he always used and that he examined it carefully before photographing the woman's body and found nothing unusual about it. Mrs. Mary Vlasek, pastor of the Spiritualist Temple, and a number of her followers stated positively that they had seen Mrs. McVicker's spirit in the temple, some time after her death, and also at the crematory.**

*The Mystery of the Frightful Invisible Monster Is Solved in the Last Chapters of*

# The Whispering Thing*

*By* LAURIE McCLINTOCK *and* CULPEPER CHUNN

**A RESUME OF THE EARLY CHAPTERS:**

**STARK terror and mysterious death follow in the wake of an unseen demon, which lurks in the city streets and houses, whispering in the ears of its victims before killing them. Medical examination shows that they were, apparently, strangled to death. One of the victims, before dying, declares the breath of the Whispering Thing is icy cold. Nobody has seen it. Nobody can imagine what it is. Then Jules Peret, French detective who is in America, undertakes to fathom the terrible mystery. After his preliminary investigation, he goes home, and when he enters his darkened rooms he feels an ice-cold breath on his cheek, and he knows he is in the presence of the Whispering Thing.**

**THE PRESENT INSTALLMENT STARTS HERE**

*CHAPTER VI. (Continued)*

THE WHISPERING THING

WITH a stifled cry, Peret whirled round and made a frantic, though futile, effort to open the door. In his slapdash haste he struck his head against the jamb and dropped the key.

Cursing fluently under his breath in four languages, he fell to his knees and felt around on the carpet. Failing to find the key, he sprang to his feet and began to fumble on the wall for the push-button.

Before he could find it, however, the Thing again whispered its warning of death in his ear and scorched his face with its icy breath.

Almost mad with terror, Peret threw himself backward and crashed against a chair with such violence that he was almost knocked senseless. For a second he lay still, to gather his forces and to fill his bursting lungs with air. His clothes were wet with perspiration, and his body cold and numb.

Expecting each instant to feel the vise-like grip of the Thing on his throat, he staggered to his feet and made another frantic effort to find the push-button. Remembering the flashlight in his pocket, he was about to reach for it, when he felt the ice-cold breath of the Thing on his face, and, in an effort to protect himself, he sprang against the wall. What he had been trying for an eternity to accomplish by strategy was now brought about by accident. His shoulder struck the push-button, and the lights flashed on.

Almost blinded by the sudden glare, blinking rapidly to clear his vision, he took a step back and swept the room with an all-embracing gaze.

Except for himself, the room *was unoccupied!*

It was, in fact, exactly as he had left it earlier in the day. The room bore not the slightest evidence of having been entered during his absence, nor was there anything large enough to afford a human being a place of concealment.

As he stood stupidly surveying the room, the whisper of the invisible menace once more sounded in his ear!

With a cry of terror, Peret whipped out his automatic and, blindly fanning the air in front of him, pulled the trigger until the magazine was empty. A picture fell to the floor with a crash and bits of plaster flew from the walls and ceiling. Scarcely waiting until the last shot was fired, Peret snatched the key off the floor and slipped it in the keyhole.

As he threw open the door, the Thing again whispered in his ear and brushed his face with its clammy breath. With a yell, the Frenchman precipitated himself into the hall with such vigor and rapidity of action that he fell sprawling. Bounding to his feet, he grabbed the knob and violently slammed the door.

"Victory!" he shouted, and his joy was excessive. "Ah, monster! *cochon! boyeux!* Thing or devil! Whatever you are, I've got you now! *Oui!*"

He shook his fist at the door and hurled at the imprisoned horror a string of excited invective.

"Your hour is come. Your shot is bolt! Assassin! Ghoul! *Voila!* how you frightened me—me, the Terrible Frog! *Dame!* I am trembling a little yet, I think."

A number of doors along the corridor opened, and men and women in night attire stuck their heads out cautiously.

"I say, old top, what's coming off?" asked one of the startled individuals, catching sight of Peret.

"Nothing," shouted Peret, and wiped the dew from his forehead.

"You are drunk," said another man, disgusted. "Go to bed. You are keeping everybody awake."

"You're a liar!" yelled Peret, and the other, fearing violence hastily closed the door.

Pinching his arm to assure himself that he was not the victim of a nightmare, Peret tried the doorknob to see if the night-latch had, by any ill chance, failed to spring. Having reassured himself on this point, he turned and, taking the steps four at a time, dashed down the stairs.

Scaring the now thoroughly-awake elevator boy nearly out of his senses with

**The first half of "The Whispering Thing" was published in the March issue of WEIRD TALES. A copy will be mailed by the publishers for 25 cents.*

his wild gestures and still wilder appearance, Peret careened into a telephone booth, and, after being connected with the police headquarters, barked into the receiver a few disjointed sentences that froze the blood of Central, who had been listening in, and made Detective Sergeant Strange, at the other end of the wire, drop the receiver and bellow an order that brought everybody within hearing distance to their feet.

Whereupon Peret, having heard the order as plainly as if he had been in Strange's office, reeled out into the lobby and collapsed in a chair to await the arrival of the homicide squad.

## *CHAPTER VII.*

## PERET EXPLAINS

AT 9 a. m. on the following morning Jules Peret presented himself at the front door of a small, unpretentious red-brick house on Fifteenth Street, one block from the home of the murdered scientist.

One would never have suspected from his manner or appearance that, eight hours previously, he had battled with an invisible menace in the narrow confines of a darkened room, and had felt stark terror grip his soul before he emerged triumphant from the most harrowing experience of his adventurous career. No one would ever have suspected that, because, to all outward appearance, Peret was at peace with the world and had no thought on his mind of greater weight than the aroma of the cigarette between his lips. Debonair as ever, and attired with the scrupulous neatness that was so characteristic of him, he made a picture that had caused more than one young lady to pay him the honor of a lingering glance when, a half-hour previously, he had issued from his apartment and pursued his way down the well populated thoroughfare.

In answer to the tinkle of the bell the door was opened three inches by the butler, a small, wrinkled, leathery-faced old Chinaman, whose head was as bald and shiny as a polished egg. In one hand he held a faded silk skull cap, which he had evidently just removed from his head or forgotten to put on.

"Whatchee want, huh?" he demanded, with a regrettable lack of civility.

"I want to see your master," returned Peret courteously, extending his card. "Please present my compliments to him, *Monsieur*, and tell him my business is pressing."

"Mlaster no see nobody," chattered Sing Tong Fat. "He sick. Allee samee dlunk. No see noblody. Clome back nex' week."

"But it is necessary that I should see your master this morning," was Peret's polite but firm retort. "Your master will be glad enough to see me when you show him my card." He displayed his badge of special officer and added, "Get a wiggle on!"

*"Yak pozee!"* shrilled Sing Tong Fat indignantly, and opened the door. "You clazy. Allee samee tong man. Master have you alested." He contorted his face until it resembled a hyena's, and broke into a shrill laugh. *"Tchee, tchee.* (yes, yes.) Alee samee tam fool clazy man."

"You are an amiable old scamp, *Monsieur,"* laughed Peret. "But we are losing time, and time is of importance. Where does your master hang out, eh? I will present my own card."

"I tellee him you see him flirst," chattered the Chinaman. "You wait here. He sleepee. Me wakee him up. He sick. Allee samee dlunk. You wait leddle time. *Tchon-dzee-ti Fan-Fu* (it is the will of the master)."

A door on the right side of the hall opened and a man stepped out into the hall. In spite of his disheveled hair and the brilliantly-colored dressing robe that covered his heavy frame, there was no mistaking the handsome features of Albert Deweese.

" 'S all right, Sing," he said, when he saw who his visitor was. "I decided to get up for a while." Then to Peret: "Good-morning, Mr. Peret. I guess you think I am an inhospitable cuss, what? Fact is, I have been trying to sleep."

"No, I do not think you are inhospitable, *Monsieur,"* replied Peret, as he shook hands. "After your experience last night, you need time to recuperate. The wonder of it is that you are able to be up at all."

"I agree with you there!" responded Deweese with feeling. "I told Sing last night when I retired to admit no one this morning until I rang, which accounts for his discourtesy in keeping you waiting. I felt the need of a round twelve hours' sleep to recover from the effects of my adventure, but I haven't been able to close my eyes. I feel as if I shall *never* be able to close them."

Deweese indeed showed the effects of his near-tragic battle with the Whispering Thing. His face was grayish-white and the heavy black circles under his bloodshot eyes accentuated his pallor and gave him an appearance that was almost ghastly. Had he been stretched out on a bed and his eyes closed, one could easily have mistaken him for a corpse.

Dismissing the garrulous and indignant old Chinaman, he crossed the hall and ushered Peret into a large, well-lighted room that was fitted out as a studio. The walls were hung with canvases of an indifferent quality in various stages of completion, and on an easel near a large double window reposed the half-completed picture of a semi-nude, which immediately caught and held the detective's gaze.

After a moment's critical inspection of the painting, Peret remarked: "You seem to be a busy man, my friend. But I don't suppose you find much interest in your paintings this morning, eh? In fact, you look on the verge of a collapse. Have you seen your physician yet?"

"That's the first thing I did after leaving Berjet's house last night," the artist replied. "He found nothing serious the matter with me, however. Shock more than anything else, I suppose. But to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit, Mr. Peret? Have you had any success in running down the Thing?"

"Yes and no," answered Peret, and then went on to explain: "We are hot on the trail, but haven't yet succeeded in entirely clearing up the mystery. It was in the hope that you would be able to help me a little that I called upon you this morning. I thought you might like to see the affair through to the end."

"Good!" cried the artist, his feverish eyes glittering with eagerness. "After I had gotten some sleep, I intended hunting you up, anyway. You are right when you say I want to see the thing through to the finish. You can count on me to help you in any way that lies in my power. God knows, there is no one more eager than myself to get to the bottom of this affair! With the Whispering Thing still at large—"

He shuddered involuntarily, laughed, and added, "It is difficult for you to understand my feelings, I guess."

"Perhaps it's not as difficult as you imagine, my friend," said Peret quietly, subsiding into a chair. He selected a cigarette from the case the artist proffered, and continued: "But let us get down to business. First, I will recount a few facts disclosed by my investigations and then explain how you can help me. In the meantime, let us be comfortable. You are as pale as a ghost. Be seated, my dear fellow, I beg of you," he added with solicitude.

"Oh, I am not as bad off as I may appear," declared Deweese confidently, dropping into a chair nevertheless. "I will be all right after a few hours' rest. Now, let me have your story. Naturally, I am consumed with curiosity to hear what you have discovered."

"Ah, you are a delightful companion, *Monsieur,*" was Peret's genial response. "Me—I am a great talker, but a poor listener. I will tell you what I know with pleasure. But let me first congratulate you upon the excellence of these Persian cigarettes. *Sacre!* But you have a delicate taste, *Monsieur.*"

The artist bowed his acknowledgment to the compliment, but impatiently. It was evident that he was eager to hear what the Frenchman had on his mind, and Peret, remarking this, did not keep him longer in suspense.

"I will not take up your time by recounting all that has transpired since I saw you last night, *Monsieur,*" began Peret, "and for the sake of convenience I will tell my story in a round-about sort of way. Let me begin with my first attempt to motivate Berjet's murder.

"M. Berjet was, as you are doubtless aware, a scientist of international repute. In scientific circles, in fact, he was a towering figure. I have the honor of having had a casual acquaintanceship with him for several years, and as I knelt beside his dead body on the sidewalk last night I recalled to mind many of the achievements that had brought him moderate wealth and fame. Among other things. I remembered having recently seen a newspaper account of a new invention of his—a poison gas of unparalleled destructive powers, the formula of which several warring nations have been trying to purchase.

"As clues were sadly lacking, and our investigation in his house failed to reveal any satisfactory explanation for Berjet's death, I at once assumed that the motive for the murder had been the theft of the formula. I knew that at least one of the nations that have been trying to acquire the formula would go to almost any length to gain possession of a new and really effective weapon of this kind. I therefore got in touch with the Secret Service, which usually has an intimate knowledge of such matters, and learned several facts that made me more certain than ever that I was on the right track.

"Berjet's poison gas, I learned, is indeed a terrible destructive agent. It is said to be even more deadly than Lewisite. A minute portion of a drop, if placed on the ground, will kill every living thing, vegetable and animal, within a radius of half a mile. Think, then, what a ton would do!

"Berjet called his invention 'Q-gas.' The formula was first offered to our government for a moderate sum, and rejected, and at the time of his death the savant was negotiating for its sale to the French government."

"Surely, you are not going to try to make me believe that this Q-gas played a direct part in the death of Berjet and Sprague and the attack on me," interrupted Deweese. "Believe me, Mr. Peret—"

"I do believe you, my friend," was Peret's smiling response. "The gas itself played no part in the tragedy last night, but the formula is at the bottom of all of the trouble, as has been suggested. The murders were simply incidental to the robbery of the formula."

"Have you discovered who the robber was?" queried Deweese, with natural curiosity.

"Yes," replied Peret calmly. "Even without clues to work with, this would not have been very difficult. Of the several nations that have been trying to get possession of the Q-gas formula there are only one or two that would authorize their agents to go to such extremes as were employed last night to acquire it, and as virtually all of their agents are known to the Secret Service, our search would have been confined to a limited group of men and women. It would simply have been a matter of elimination."

Deweese nodded his understanding, and the sleuth continued:

"Almost from the very first, however, for reasons which I will explain later, I was led to suspect a man who has since turned out to be a notorious international agent, known in diplomatic circles as Count Vincent di Dalfonzo. During his absence, I made a somewhat hurried search of his rooms after my departure from the scientist's house, but could find nothing to incriminate him.

"One of my operatives, however, a former Secret Service agent, was able to identify him, if nothing more. According to this operative, Dalfonzo, who is one of the greatest scoundrels unhung, at the present time bears the secret credentials of a nation I will leave unnamed, but one which, I have reason to know, has made several unsuccessful attempts to buy the Q-gas formula from Berjet."

Deweese was leaning forward in his chair, an eager listener. As Peret paused to relight his cigarette, he remarked:

"If Dalfonzo is such a notorious character, one would have thought that the Secret Service would have kept him under its eye."

"One would have thought so, indeed," agreed Peret, expelling a cloud of smoke from his lungs. "When last heard of several months ago, Dalfonzo was in Petrograd and he probably entered this country in disguise and has since kept himself well under cover."

"Have you arrested him?"

"I have scarcely had time yet, *Monsieur,*" answered Peret. "I feel safe in saying, however, that he will be in the custody of the police within the next twenty-four hours."

"Good! I will never feel safe while this scoundrel is at large, if indeed he really did have a hand in the murders of Berjet, Sprague and Adolphe, and the attack on me."

"Dalfonzo had nothing to do with Adolphe's murder, and only an indirect hand in the attack on you," said Peret. "*Sacre bleu!* Dalfonzo is not the kind of man that strikes down his victims with butcher knives and such; he is a man of delicate ideas and sensibilities, *Monsieur.*"

"So it seems," said Deweese drily. "I know that the finger prints on the dagger tend to prove that Adolphe was murdered by his employer, but in the light of the other facts can this evidence be considered conclusive? The prints on the dagger may simply be a trick to confuse the police. The Whispering Thing—But stay! For the moment I had forgotten the Whispering Thing. It seems to me that we are getting away from the main issue."

"Patience, *Monsieur,*" said Peret, with an enigmatical smile. "Everything will be explained in good time. But first, let me assure you that the finger prints on the dagger are genuine. Adolphe was undoubtedly murdered by the scientist, and as the penalty for this crime he gave his own life."

Deweese started. The Frenchman's indirect method of telling his story, and the complacence with which he stated apparently contradictory facts, confused and annoyed him.

"You mean—?" he began.

"I mean that Berjet was murdered because he stabbed his valet."

"Well," averred Deweese, unable to conceal his impatience, "all of this is about as clear as mud to me. First you say that the motive for Berjet's murder was the robbery of the formula, and now you declare that he was done away with because he killed his valet. What am I to believe?"

"What you will, *Monsieur,*" replied Peret. "Everything I have stated is true, although I confess that as yet I have nothing to prove it. If the facts seem contradictory, it is because I have expressed myself badly.

"According to my theory, Count Dalfonzo (for a consideration of course), induced Adolphe to steal the formula of Q-gas from his benefactor. When poor Berjet learned that he had been betrayed he stabbed the betrayer in

a fit of insane rage and hid the body in the closet in his library until he would have time to dispose of it. Dalfonzo in some way learned of this, or suspected it, and as he already had the formula in his possession, decided that his safest plan would be to murder Berjet before he could communicate with French Secret Service agents operating in this country, who were about to consummate the purchase of the secret. *Eh, bien!* the murder was committed, and but for one little slip, one tiny slip—*Ha; ha!* It is amusing, is it not, *Monsieur?*"

"Very!" rejoined Deweese sarcastically. "I think, however, that I have begun to get a glimmer of what you erroneously conceive to be the truth, and that is that Dalfonzo and the mysterious Thing are identical."

"Patience, *Monsieur,* patience," cried Peret. "The glimmer of light that you see is a will-o'-the wisp. Dalfonzo is a man; the Thing is—the Thing. The murders were *instigated* by Dalfonzo, but were *committed* by the invisible terror."

Deweese, as had many a man before him, began to wonder if he had to deal with an imbecile or a man by no means as feeble-minded as he seemed. In his puzzlement he stared at Peret for a moment, with mouth agape, then he leaned forward in his chair until less than two feet separated his corpselike face from Peret's.

"And what the devil *is* the Whispering Thing?" he asked sharply.

"All in good time," came the amiable reply. "Let us first consider the little slip that upset Dalfonzo's apple cart."

"Well, let us consider the little slip then," said Deweese, relaxing in his chair. "Where did our diplomatic freelance slip?"

"Why, when he tried to murder me in the same way that he did that poor Berjet," quietly responded Peret.

The artist half rose from his chair and stared at the detective with astonishment written on his face.

"Do you mean to say that *you* have been attacked by the Whispering Thing?" he demanded.

"Just that, *Monsieur.* I was attacked by the whispering phantom in my rooms last night after I left the scene of the attack on you. You can realize, therefore, that I can appreciate all that you have gone through. It is true that my experience was, in some respects, not as terrible as your own, because I escaped the Thing before it could do me bodily harm. But I never expect entirely to recover from the fright it gave me. *Mon dieu,* what a monster this Dalfonzo is!"

"It was at his instigation that the Thing attacked you?" questioned Deweese.

"Who else?" asked Peret.

"Well," cried Deweese, impatiently, "why do you beat around the bush so much? Be definite. What the devil is the Whispering Thing? And who, exactly, is the man you call Dalfonzo?"

Peret lifted his eyes and gazed steadily at the artist.

"I will answer your second question first, *Monsieur,*" he replied, with exasperating slowness. "My answer will explain why I have been beating around the bush, as you call it."

He leaned slightly forward, his right hand in his coat pocket, his eyes smiling, the muscles around his mouth tense.

"Count Vincent di Dalfonzo," he said, "is the man who at the present time calls himself Albert Deweese—*Don't move, Monsieur!* The revolver in my coat pocket is centered on your heart!"

## *CHAPTER VIII.*

## THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED.

IF PERET expected to catch Deweese off his guard, he was sadly disappointed. The artist met his gaze squarely, and without any apparent emotion.

Flicking the ashes from his cold cigarette, he applied a lighted match to it and tossed the charred splinter upon the floor. The corpselike look of his face became a little accentuated, perhaps, and there was a slight narrowing of the eyes that had not been apparent before; but, except for that, there was no change in his manner or appearance.

For a moment neither of the men spoke. Their eyes clashed and held. The stillness became tense, electric, as they contemplated each other through the haze of smoke that curled from the ends of their cigarettes. Finally:

"You are quite mad, I think," remarked Deweese, unmoved. "Where the deuce did you ever get the idea that I was Dalfonzo?"

Peret was unable to conceal his admiration.

"You are a great actor, *Monsieur,* and a brave man," he declared in a tone that left no doubt of his sincerity. "I told part of my story to test you—a sort of indirect third degree—but so far not a muscle of your face has moved. What a pity it is you are such a damned scoundrel!"

Deweese laughed shortly.

"It is always safe to insult a man when you have him covered," he observed composedly. "Nevertheless, pray continue. You interest me exceedingly, and cause me no annoyance. Your wild theories brand you a fool and an ass, and, strangely enough, it always gives me pleasure to hear an ass bray. Proceed, my dear chap."

"There are many others whose opinion of me is similar to your own," said Peret blandly; "but the fool is he who holds his enemy in contempt."

Deweese's eyes flashed.

"Well, dear enemy, what makes you think that I am the chap you call Dalfonzo?" he questioned, smiling with his lips.

"You will not admit your identity, then?" countered the detective.

"Certainly I will admit my identity," said Deweese, with a laugh. "I am Albert Deweese, very much at your service. What reason have you for believing me to be the man you call Dalfonzo—a man who, if one is to believe you, seems to be in league with an invisible demon that commits murders for him? The very fact that I almost met my death at the hands of the Whispering Thing is proof that I am not the man you seek. If I had anything to do with the Thing, does it seem reasonable to suppose that I would turn it loose on myself?"

"The attack on you was an accident, *Monsieur*—a bit of retributive justice, perhaps. Were it not for the fact that you still suffer from the effects of it, I would say that you only got part of what was coming to you. Not a full dose of your own medicine, *Monsieur*—just a taste of it. Ah, you are clever, my friend, clever as the fiends in hell; but, it appears, not clever enough. *Diable, Monsieur,* you should have better trained that terrible monster before you turned it loose, eh?"

"You seem to like to talk in riddles," snapped Deweese. "What is the Whispering Thing, anyway? If you know, I shall be obliged if you will tell me."

Very well, my friend," acquiesced Peret. "I will do so with pleasure. The invisible monster, the terrible, whispering, breathing, fear-inspiring demon is—"

*"Well?"* demanded Deweese tersely.

"One little bat," concluded Peret—"or rather, two little bats."

Absurd as the detective's statement may have sounded, its effect on the artist was, nevertheless, pronounced. His gaze wavered and his face, if such a thing were possible, became a shade paler. His recovery, however, was almost immediate.

"I do not know what it was that attacked you last night," he sneered. "It may have been and probably was a bat. It is possible that an insect could strike terror in the heart of a delicate little flower like you. But if you think a bat

attacked *me*—" with one of his chilling laughs—"I can only say that I think you are a poor damned fool."

"There are times that I think the same thing," replied Peret, seriously; "but this is not one of them. I not only think that the Thing was a bat—I *know* it. And to prove to you how futile it is for you to pretend ignorance of the Thing, and of your own identity, let me reenact in words the tragedy that ended in the death of two good and innocent men."

"Do so," gritted Deweese, his cold blue eyes glittering. "But if you think you can convince me that the Thing that attacked me was a bat—"

"As I have already stated," said Peret, fixing his gaze on the unwavering eyes of the artist, "the murder of M. Berjet was conceived after you learned that Adolphe had been killed. You deemed it necessary to your own safety. Having completed your diabolical plans, therefore, you lost no time in calling at the scientist's home. Upon reaching your destination, you entered the house by way of the front door, which you found unlocked. The door of the library or sitting-room, on the other hand, was secured.

"You therefore placed a chair in front of the door to stand on and opened the transom over the door. After tying a handkerchief over your mouth and nostrils, you raised the cover of a little box you had brought with you and released a bat in the room. Then you closed the transom and departed from the house as silently as you had entered it.

"The bat proved to be a faithful ally, *Monsieur*. On little rubber pads that you had glued on the upper side of its wings was a preparation used by the Dyaks to poison the tips of their arrows and spears. The preparation, which you used in powdered form, with a few added ingredients of your own, as employed by the Dyaks, consists of a paste made from the milky sap of the upas tree, dissolved in a juice extracted from the tuba root. With one possible exception, it is the most deadly poison known, a minute quantity, breathed in through the nostrils or absorbed into the system through an abrasion on the skin, causing almost instant death.

"When you released the bat in the library, it began to circle around the room and its fluttering wings scattered the powder and poisoned the air to such an extent that poor Berjet had only time, before he died, to realize the significance of the bat's presence in the room and to leap through the window in a vain effort to save himself.

"You, in the meantime, had walked slowly down the street, and when the scientist catapulted himself through the window-sash, you were calmly lighting a cigarette under the corner lamp post half a block away. The complication was one you doubtless had not anticipated; you had though that Berjet would die an instant death when he got a whiff of the powder.

"Nevertheless, you had nothing to fear, you thought; you had laid your plans too carefully. Like any innocent pedestrian would be expected to do, therefore, you ran back down the street, determined to be in at the finish, to see your work well done.

"All this time the bat—whose mouth and nostrils, by the way, you had protected with a tiny gauze mask from which the creature could eventually free itself—was no doubt flying around and around, trying to find egress from the room. It was while you were standing on the pavement in front of the house, talking with Sprague and Greenleigh, that the bat discovered the broken window-sash and escaped into the open air.

"As it winged its way aimlessly over the sidewalk, it flew close enough to Sprague to scatter some of the powder in his face, and an instant later, continuing its flight, it passed in front of you.

"Dr. Sprague inhaled a fatal amount of the powder, but you breathed in only enough to throw you into a kind of convulsion. The struggles of both you and the physician to get your breath and otherwise to overcome the seizure made it appear that you were grappling with an invisible antagonist. Sprague succumbed almost instantly; but you, after a brief struggle, recovered, and in order to throw me off the track, as you believed, cleverly conceived the 'invisible monster.'

"Nor did you have to draw much upon your imagination for the 'whispering sound' and the 'icy breathing' of the unholy creature of your mind. The *whir* of the bat's wings as it flew past you made a sound not unlike that of a sibilant whisper, while the whiffs of air that the animal's wings fanned against your cheek, suggested the 'cold and clammy breathing' of the mythical monster.

"*Ma foi!* well do I know whereof I speak, *Monsieur*, for I heard the 'whisper' and felt the 'breath' of the Thing myself. The bat that was loosed in my room last night gave me the fright of my life. When its wings brushed against the wall it sounded like a whisper of the devil himself, and when its wings fanned the air against my face, I thought a corpse was breathing death into my soul. No coward am I, *monsieur*, but the 'whispering' and 'breathing' were so terribly real—which only goes to show what suggestion will do to a vivid imagination. You had talked so earnestly and so picturesquely about the 'whisper' and the 'breath' of the Thing, that when I first heard the *whir* of the little animal's wings in the inky-dark room—*Dame!* It makes me shiver yet!

"Fortunately, however, the bat had been in my room long enough before I entered it to shake all the deadly powder from its wings. The powder had settled and the air was pure before I crossed the threshold of that room, else I would have died a quick and horrible death.

"The same thing is true of the bat that sprinkled death in the face of Berjet. When you and I, in company with the police, entered the scientist's house, the bat had been gone for several minutes, and the stray particles of pulverized death had settled. You realized this, of course, or you would not have entered the room. If Strange and I had entered the house five minutes earlier, you would have let us enter it alone."

Peret took a lavender handkerchief from the breast pocket of his coat and wiped from his brow some beads of perspiration. A slight moisture was also noticeable on the forehead of the artist, but it was due to another cause. Although he must have known that each world of the detective's was a strand in the rope that was being woven around his neck, he gave no signs of emotion. Inwardly, the strain had begun to tell on him, but outwardly he was calm, confident, almost indifferent.

Restoring the handkerchief to his pocket, Peret resumed: "I confess that at first the case baffled me. Through a mistake of my own, soon to be explained, I got started on the wrong track. Your story of the Whispering Thing did not impress me, although I did not at first suspect you of deliberately trying to deceive me. I laid the Thing to your imagination and wrought-up condition. My skepticism vanished, however, when I reached my rooms, as I have explained.

At first I scarcely knew what to believe. The asphyxiation theory of Sprague and, later on, of Coroner Rane set my mind in motion, but led me nowhere, because it did not fit in with my interpretation of Berjet's last words. As a matter of fact, nothing else seemed to fit in with anything. Clues ran counter to each other and the facts themselves clashed.

"I got my first inspiration when you declared that the breathing of the Thing was cold and clammy, for this made it seem likely that poison fumes had been

fanned in your face by some mechanical device. Had it not been for the horrible experience in my room, this is the theory upon which I should have based my investigation."

"Then you captured the bat?" said Deweese, in a tense voice.

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" nodded Peret. "I tried to shoot the tiny thing, without even knowing what it was; but I ask you in all seriousness, my friend, could one hope to hit with a thirty-two bullet a *chauve-souris* that one could not see? Not I! So I telephoned for the police and they came and conquered it with a tear bomb!

"The bat, *Monsieur,* was then turned over to the city chemists, and they analyzed the traces of powder found adhering to the little pads on its wings. Their report gave me the name of the poison that opened the gates of eternity for Berjet and Sprague."

Peret twisted the needle-points of his slender black mustache and beamed upon his host.

"But why accuse me? "asked Deweese, smiling. "I have no bats in my menagerie—nothing, in fact, but a flea-bitten bulldog."

Peret's face became sober.

"You stand accused not by me," he said solemnly, "but by Berjet, the first of your victims."

"What's that?" asked Deweese sharply. For the first time, he seemed alarmed. He sat up suddenly in his chair, and as suddenly relaxed, but the hunted look that crept into his eyes continued to show how sharply the blow has struck home.

"You start, eh? Good! My reasoning is sound. Yes, my friend; Berjet is your accuser. Just before he died, he uttered two words. The first word was 'assassins;' and the other was a word that I at first believed to be '*dix,*' the French word for 'ten,' which is pronounced *dees.* I thought Berjet meant he had been attacked by ten assassins, incredible as it seemed. That is what got me all balled up, as the saying goes.

"But after I heard your name, and let it roll around in my mind for awhile, I realized my mistake. The dying man did not say *Dix.* He pronounced your name, or rather, your present *alias,* 'Deweese.'

"When realization of this burst upon me, I was so gratified that I decided to lay a little trap for you. I became very excited, you may recall, shouted that I knew what the Whispering Thing was, that the mystery was solved! I wanted you to show your hand, my friend. But I was not looking for you to act through a confederate, and as a result I very obligingly walked into the little trap which you, in turn, laid for me.

"Who was it that put the *chauve-souris* in my room, eh? Was it Sing Tong Fat? It could not have been you, for you have been under surveillance every minute of the time since you left the murdered scientist's house last night. I think you gave Sing Tong Fat instructions to destroy me over the telephone, for the police report you as having called your house from Greenleigh's durug store after your departure from Berjet's. Ah, that devil of a Chinaman! I was watching him through the kitchen window for a little while this morning polishing silver, and he was singing to himself! *Pardieu!* he has an easy conscience for a would-be murderer, *monsieur!*"

"You have a very fertile imagination," remarked Deweese, when Peret paused to blow the ashes from his cigarette. "But your fairy tale amuses me, so pray continue. In view of the fact that I was near the scene of the crime when Berjet was murdered, it is not difficult to perceive how you mght confuse my name with the scientist's last utterance. But how you ever came to identify me with Dalfonzo is past my comprehension."

"That is very easily explained," was Peret's affable reply. "After leaving the scene of the crime last night, I had your house placed under surveillance of the operative I have already mentioned. While he was waiting for me to join him, so we could search the house, he saw Sing Tong Fat through one of the windows and recognized him as your familiar.

"There are very few foreign agents unknown to the Secret Service, and my operative has the record of you and Sing Tong Fat at his finger-tips. He knows that you and the Chinaman have been associated for years, and that at the present time you are working in the interests of Soviet Russia. Sing Tong Fat is not the idiot he appears to be; he is an international agent that several countries would give a good deal to lay their hands on.

"When my operative saw Sing Tong Fat in your house, he did not have to tax his mind much to deduce the name of the 'master' he is serving. Before I joined the operative, some one called Sing Tong Fat on the 'phone and he left the house almost immediately afterward. As the time of the call coincides with the hour you are reported as having 'phoned from Greenleigh's drug store, I have no doubt that the message was from you. As the operative had instructions to wait for me, he did not shadow Sing Tong Fat when he left the house, which is a pity, for he probably would have caught the old scoundrel in the act of putting the bat in my room. After I arrived on the scene, we amused ourselves by searching your house—this house—thoroughly."

"So it was you prowling around here last night, was it?" said Deweese savagely. "I wish I had known it; you should not have gotten away so easily."

"Then I am glad you did not know," laughed Peret. "Your bulldog and your bullet made it lively enough as it was."

"I hope that you found your search worth while," sneered Deweese.

"No," replied Peret regretfully; "my search gave you a clean bill of health. We did not find the formula or anything else that would incriminate you. Nevertheless, *Monsieur,* your little game has been played—played and lost.

"And you played the game badly, too, my friend. For a man of your intelligence, your blunders are inexcusable. Why did you not leave that bloodthirsty old Chinaman in Russia, *Monsieur?* You can never hope to remain incognito as long as you have Sing Tong Fat in tow. His hatchet face is too well known. Your other blunders were all just as glaring as this one. Why did you linger near the scene of your crime, eh? And introduced yourself to the human bloodhounds that were searching out your scent! Ah, *Monsieur,* I admire your self confidence, but you have an over abundance of it."

"Perhaps," said Deweese, with an ironic smile. "At any rate, it doesn't desert me now. For I know that you cannot convict me. You haven't a shred of real evidence against me, and the chain of circumstantial evidence you have woven around me would be laughed to scorn in a jury room."

"You are right," assented Peret, almost apologetically, "So far I have only been able to reconstruct the crime in my mind by piecing together inconsequential nothings that do not constitute legal evidence. Surmises, deductions, and a stray fact or two—I possess nothing more, my friend. But for the present they must suffice. Before I am through, however, I promise to tie you up in a knot of incontestable evidence."

"That you will never be able to do," declared Deweese, "for I am innocent of the murders of Berjet and Sprague. I deny any knowledge of the crimes, in fact, except what I saw in your presence last night. However, ever since you have been here, I have noticed your hand toying with the revolver in your pocket, so I presume that I am under arrest, what?"

"What the devil do I want to arrest you for?" asked Peret, with feigned astonishment. "You yourself have said that I have no real evidence against you."

The lids of Deweese's eyes narrowed and the lines around his mouth grew hard. The pupils of his eyes, contracted to half their usual size, looked like points of cold fire.

"If you are not here to arrest me, what's your game?" he demanded.

"Oh, I just wanted to see what effect my theories would have on you," replied Peret calmly, as he rose to his feet. "I am a close student of psychology, and I find much in you that interests me. Thanks for your hospitality, *Monsieur,*" he continued, opening the door. "Perhaps I shall have an opportunity to return the courtesy some day, as I have no doubt we shall meet again."

"Rest assured of that," rejoined Deweese, with a sinister smile. "We shall certainly meet again."

"It is written," returned Peret.

He looked at Deweese for a moment, and then, with a bow, withdrew from the room.

### *CHAPTER IX.*

### THE WORM TURNS

WHEN the door had closed behind the detective, Deweese walked across the room and put his ear to the keyhole.

He heard the shrill chatter of Sing Tong Fat as he let Peret out of the house, and the slam of the front door when he closed it behind him. Heaving a sigh of relief, Deweese threw himself into a chair. The strain through which he had just come had been terrific. Ordinarily, he would have found a battle of wits with the detective much to his liking, for it was for just such games as this that he lived. But his experience with the Whispering Thing had left his nerves in such a state that he felt he had been no match for the Frenchman.

Nevertheless, now that he was at least temporarily unembarrassed by the detective's presence, his brain began to function more normally and he set about evolving plans to extricate himself from his hazardous position. What a devil the Frenchman was! The man's powers of deduction smacked of the supernatural. And yet—

He knitted his brow. Recalling to his mind his own blundering, it was not so difficult, after all, to perceive how the detective had arrived at his conclusions. He, Deweese, had laid his plans so carefully, that he had believed detection impossible. But now, viewing the working out of his plan in retrospection, he could see where he had erred, and cursed himself for his carelessness. His blunders, as Peret had implied, had been too obvious to escape notice. Should not the remarkable accuracy of Peret's reasoning, therefore, be attributed to chance rather than to genius? The accursed dying speech of the scientist had given him the key to the mystery, and it was certainly only an ill chance that had led him to be on hand to hear it. With such a clue to work on, he reasoned, the solving of the case had simply been a matter of routine. Without this clue, the detective would have been lost. The fact that he himself had been attacked by the Whispering Thing would have shielded him from suspicion.

As he thought of his chance encounter with the bat, he shuddered. The accident in itself proved his carelessness. It had indeed almost proved his death. As Peret had said, he had been a fool to linger near the scene of his crime, but he had been so sure, so confident, that he had done his work too well to fear detection. As for Peret—well, his very frankness proved that he was something of a fool. Who but an idiot would have exposed his hand when he knew that his opponent held the strongest cards!

Of course, there was a possibility that the Frenchman was holding something back, but what if he was? Was he, Count Vincent di Dalfonzo, "mystery man" of a hundred *aliases* and acknowledged by the police to be the cleverest international crook outside of prison bars, to be deprived of his liberty and a fortune by an imbecile of a private detective?

He laughed, and his laugh did not sound pleasant. After all, he had the formula, and the game was not yet lost. His blunders had not been as bad as they might have been. He would have been arrested at once, he argued, had Peret believed that there was even the slightest chance of convicting him. It only remained for him to make one imperative move, and then sit tight. The Frenchman was bluffing, or perhaps he was laying another of his diabolical traps. Well, he should see!

After fortifyng himself with a stiff drink of whisky from the flask in the table drawer, he tapped the hand-bell on the table, and Sing Tong Fat, as if he had been awaiting the summons, entered the room with noiseless tread.

"Did you let that blankety-blank Frenchman out?" demanded Deweese.

"*Tchèe, tchée,*" chattered Sing Tong Fat. "He gone. Me watchee him glo dlown stleet. He allee samee tam fool clazy man. He say he blowee topee head off. *Hoi, hoi.*" He drew one of the silken sleeves of his blouse across his face and looked at his master anxiously. "He say polis alle lound house in stleet, *Fan-Fu.* He talkee allee samee Victrolee—"

"The house is still under surveillance, is it?" observed Deweese, wrinkling his brow. "Well, so much the better. We work best when we work cautiously, and we are not likely to be incautious when we know we are watched."

He lighted a fresh cigarette and gazed reflectively at the thread of smoke that curled upward from the lighted end. The drink of whisky had cleared his brain, and, alert, feverishly bright-eyed, every nerve in tune, he was now the man who for years had matched wits with the continental police and eluded them at every turn. Sing Tong Fat, well aware of the seriousness of the situation, shuffled his feet uneasily and waited, with an anxious look on his face, for his "master" to speak.

"Sing Tong Fat," said Deweese, finally, "you and I have been friends and coworkers for many years. We have associated in many dangerous enterprises and I have always been liberal when it came to a division of the spoils. As we have shared the pleasures of our adventures, so too have we shared their dangers. I feel it only fair to tell you, therefore, that our peril has never been so great as it is now. Unless we act quickly we are doomed. You follow me, do you not?"

Sing Tong Fat touched his forehead and gravely nodded.

"It seems as if Fate has been against us from the very beginning in the Q-gas business," resumed Deweese in an unemotional tone. "The murder of Berjet, while necessary, was unfortunate, and since then we have had one stroke of bad luck after the other. We erred in trying to kill the French detective in the manner we did. He should have been knifed, swiftly, surely, silently. The bat that I instructed you to put in his room failed to accomplish his death and gave him a clue which, if we are not careful, may prove to be our undoing. Most important of all, both of us have been recognized. So you can realize how serious the situation is."

"I await thy command, O Illustrious Master," said the Chinaman gravely, in his native tongue.

Deweese, as if he took this for granted, nodded and proceeded:

"Of the two of us you have the most cunning, and you therefore stand the better chance of eluding the police. This is not flattery; it is wisdom I have acquired through the years of my association with you. You are as elusive as

*(Continued on page 119)*

*Strange, Indeed, Are the Possibilities of the Human Mind. A Weird Example Is Found in*

# THE DEATH CELL

*By* F. K. MOSS

"MAN is by nature an experimenter," argued my friend, Dr. Armand, a psychologist of some repute, "and he is steadily delving into the Unknown and bringing to light knowledge that is often appalling in its intricacy of concept.

"He gathers about him a few relatively simple pieces of apparatus and discovers the existence of particles infinitely smaller than the most minute object visible under the ultra-microscope. He measures its size, mass, electrical charge, and in truth finds out more about it than he knows of visible objects. All of this he learns about matter that he can never even hope to see with his naked eye. The simple but marvelous instrument, the spectroscope, tells him of the composition of the stars. It told him that upon the sun there is an element unknown upon this earth; he called it helium, and later discovered and isolated the gas after first finding it on a body millions of miles away. Beautiful indeed, is modern science!"

Armand paused for a moment as if more fully to comprehend the scope of the subject, and then continued:

"But the most refined and sensitive piece of apparatus, if I may call it that, and about which so little is understood, is the human brain. A vast amount of research has been done along the lines of psychology by many able men and the data has been formulated into several well established hypotheses, and yet"—he stretched out his arms in a vague sort of gesture—"how little we really know about the brain!"

We had met, as had been our custom, at Armand's apartment to enjoy an afternoon together and to discuss old times and friends. I must confess, with all due respect to the Doctor, that the subject was often soon changed into a scientific lecture by him on his favorite theme, psychology. I really enjoyed these informal talks immensely, for there is no more entertaining speaker than the scholarly Armand.

I nodded. "Yes, I suppose so, but it seems a natural consequence—the brain. How can the brain be studied and mathematically analyzed like—well, mechanics, for example?"

"Perhaps that is not such an impossibility as it would seem," said Armand. "In the past the whole proposition has been studied conceiving of the brain as a matter quite as abstract as the 'soul.' The more recent school of investigation has attacked the problem, bearing in mind that, after all, the functioning of the brain might be governed by the same laws of physics that can be universally applied elsewhere.

"The application of the electron theory is not absurd in the least. However, all research must be based upon the axiom, 'If an occurrence can be made to take place under certain conditions, then the repetition of those conditions should invariably produce the same occurrence.' As yet this fact has not been established firmly in the case of the brain.

"I have," he continued, "just finished obtaining the data on the most absorbing case I have ever had the opportunity to study. The data was available only in fragments obtained from various sources, and in many places I have been forced to bridge the gaps by drawing purely from my conception, or imagination, of what took place."

I was deeply interested in Dr. Armand's work, particularly in a case which he deemed so extraordinary, and I urged him to relate the thing in some detail.

"The first part of the amazing affair is of common knowledge and varies little from many other cases on record. However, the weirdest and most intensely absorbing episode began after the rest of the world conceded the whole unfortunate affair closed forever. Perhaps it would have been closed had the principal actor been but slightly different in mentality, or even in a different mood at the crucial hour. Potentially, there might be many possibilities of such an occurrence, but the probability of the combination of the required circumstances at the critical hour, is infinitesimal. Even the exact repetition of the conditions might not necessarily produce the same results."

Dr. Armand then related the story as he conceived it, prefacing his remarks with the statement:

"If the reactions of what we term the abnormal mind could only be chronicled, we would stand aghast at what would be written."

## DR. ARMAND'S STRANGE NARRATIVE

THE friendship of James McKay and William Larson was a source of wonder and pleasure to their mutual friends and acquaintances. Such was the close companionship of the two men that they were often laughingly referred to as "David and Jonathan."

Each regarded the other with pride, respect, and understanding. Possibly there could not have been found a more glorious example of the love of one man for another than this one. Certainly few, if any, would have been so mentally constituted as to produce reactions which would lead to such terrible results.

McKay had met Larson some six years previous through his newspaper work, both being on the staff of a Denver newspaper. Strangely, in view of their later friendship, neither was particularly attracted to the other until some time later.

On this occasion McKay had been asked to "sit in" a card game at Larson's apartment, which he willingly did, for games of chance were attractive to McKay. The party lasted nearly the entire night, and upon breaking up, Larson offered to share his room with McKay, as the latter lived at some distance.

What drew the two men together is impossible to say, but their friendship must have ripened quickly, for the next evening found McKay established permanently as a roommate of Larson.

In appearance, if their expressions were analyzed, the two men were strikingly alike; enough so to be readily taken for brothers. Both were of a slender athletic build, dark complexioned, and with sharp, clean-cut features—sportsmen, in every sense of the word.

In character, however, there was much difference. McKay, the younger, was an impulsive, quick-acting and confident sort of fellow, easily offended, but correspondingly quick to accept an apology. While clever in many respects, he was not given to concentrated and painstaking study.

This trait was evident from his writing—original, snappy, entertaining, but often lacking in fine details of accuracy. Larson, on the other hand, was of a more conservative type, slower but more positive in his actions, and of a nature that inquired into things in a thorough and precise fashion.

Such was the well-known friendship of the two that great was the surprise of all who knew McKay when, his face black with anger, he entered the barroom of the Palace Hotel and demanded:

"Where's that damned Larson?"

Friends at once tried to ascertain the trouble, and also to urge him to return to his home, as he had evidently been drinking heavily. But McKay was in no mood to be pacified by his friends.

"Don't interfere in my affairs!" he snarled.

Then he ordered a drink, swallowed it at a gulp, and then seated himself in a far corner of the room.

McFadden, a close friend of both Larson and McKay, went over to him and, linking his arm in McKay's in a hearty and jovial manner, attempted to take him away. McKay turned on him so savagely that he gave it up, resolving to find Larson and learn the reason for McKay's anger.

As McKay only sat and watched and waited, his eyes blazed with a deadly gleam.

MCKAY had become, as Larson expressed it, hypnotized by and infatuated with a really beautiful but altogether shallow and irresponsible sort of woman. The affair had caused Larson a great deal of annoyance, as McKay would, at times, become extraordinarily cheerful and then sink into spells of despondency so sullen and irritable that even the quiet-natured Larson found it impossible to live with him.

These moods, as Larson well knew, were occasioned by Miss Conway's treatment of Jim. Her influence over McKay seemed as unlimited as it was magical. Larson had tried to reason with Jim, and had tried to convince him that Miss Conway did not care seriously for him or any one else except herself. But all his efforts produced no other effect than to kindle new passion in McKay.

On the evening mentioned, McKay had asked permission to call at her home, but was refused, she pleading a previous engagement. For some unknown reason (the guiding hand of fate, for those who believe in fate), he walked out to her home, and as he drew near he saw Larson—his old pal, Bill Larson—enter the home of Miss Conway!

For a moment he stood as if stunned. Of all persons, Bill was the last he would have suspected.

Then it all became plain to him—Bill had tried to alienate the girl's love!

Slowly, listlessly, McKay turned and retraced his steps to his room. He sat there a long while in the dark and let his mind become polluted with the poison of an insane jealousy, while he saturated his system and dulled his conscience with whisky.

About eleven he rose, placed a gun in his pocket, and started for the hotel where he and Larson often met in the

evening. As he walked, his mind became closed to reason, closed to his regard for his friend, closed to everything except that Larson had double-crossed him. As he sat and waited in the barroom his brain focused itself on this one point until it had taken possession of him.

He had been there about a half hour when Larson appeared, laughing and chatting with some friends. Bill was in great spirits, for he had accomplished, that night, the thing he had long sought. Miss Conway had been very reasonable and had promised that she would cause McKay no more anxiety.

McFadden and a few others hastened at once toward him to tell him about McKay. But they were too late, for Larson, espying McKay, sang out:

"Hello, Jim, old scout! Come over and 'hist' one with us!"

McKay jumped up and strode over to the bar, his eyes glittering and his mouth twitching with hatred.

"You damn — — —!" and he leveled an accusing finger at Larson.

"Jim!" cried Larson, "what's wrong?" Larson was greatly shocked and distressed over the condition of his friend, and he overlooked, if he heard, the insult hurled at him.

"So that was what you wanted?" McKay snarled.

"My God, Jim, what is it?"

"You may have beaten me, but you will never, never get her!" And a stream of fire leapt from McKay's gun and Larson dropped to the floor, uttering but one one word—"Jim!"

The weapon dropped from McKay's limp hand, and his face was ashen as he gazed, speechlessly, at the bleeding and lifeless body of his best friend on earth.

He slowly turned away, and later surrendered himself to the authorities.

The tragic affair caused a great deal of comment. Some three weeks after the murder the case was brought to trial and attracted widespread interest. The dingy West Side courtroom was crowded to capacity. Friends, acquaintances, business men, curiosity seekers, fought for seats.

Considerable difficulty was encountered in the selection of a jury. The popularity of the murdered man, as well as the defendant, made it hard to find an unbiased yet capable juryman.

After that, however, the trial was brief, the end coming with almost startling suddenness. The state's case was plain and simple. The evidence was overwhelmingly against McKay, and the situation was not improved by his refusal to offer any defense.

His attorney put up the plea of temporary insanity. His arguments held weight. The plea was eloquent and logical, and probably would have been a deciding factor had not McKay himself, at the conclusion of the address, risen—and, to the dumbfounded court and attorney, refused to accept insanity as a defense.

The jury was out fifty minutes and returned a verdict of "guilty in the first degree," and recommended the death penalty. All eyes were turned toward McKay, who remained perfectly emotionless.

The judge then pronounced the death sentence on James McKay.

THE friends of McKay were surprised at the severity of the penalty. Especially dejected over the outcome were McFadden, a brother newspaper man; Kirk, an oil operator, and Barnard, a young Medic, for these three, with McKay and Larson, had formed what they termed the "gang." Now one of the five was dead and another was sentenced to be hung.

They at once demanded a new trial, but it was refused. Scarcely could the men refrain from emotion when McKay asked them and his attorney to settle up his wordly affairs. As he was without a family, he willed all his property to his three friends, and even mentioned in some detail a few personal effects he wanted each to have.

Of all present, McKay was the least affected by the scene. His voice and movements were those of an automaton rather than that of a human being. Indeed, he was practically such and had been so since the death of Larson.

After attending to the last detail of his worldly affairs he rose and silently shook the hands of his friends. Accompanied by two plain clothesmen, handcuffed wrist to wrist, he left them and started on his last trip to Canon City. He had often visited that little Colorado city, and had spent many a pleasant time there. He requested the officers to drive down Seventeenth Street.

At one end was the golden dome of the State Capitol, brilliantly aglow from the crimson rays of the setting sun; at the other was the station, dark against the purple, snow-capped Rockies.

As he neared the station he looked long and sadly at the huge arch erected at the entrance. The word *Mizpath* was blazoned across the arch.

THE utmost consideration was shown McKay by the prison authorities, who were well acquainted with the young reporter. The Warden met him at the office and personally took him to the death cell.

The door clamped shut and the bolts shot in place with metallic harshness, and the law began to exact its penalty as it had done in the Dark Ages—caging him in with stone and steel.

Five days passed, long grinding days and longer nights, for sleep no longer supplied periods of relaxation. His friends were agreeably surprised when they visited him a few days later to find him in an apparently cheerful frame of mind. He talked of Larson in the freest sort of manner. He delighted in dwelling upon the characteristics of his late friend. More and more, as the days passed by, did he like to discuss Larson. He would relate incident after incident in the life of the latter which, due to the closeness of their friendship, he knew quite as well as his own.

As to his impending execution, he seemed surprisingly unconcerned. Calmly and without bitterness, McKay waited for justice to take its course.

BARNARD and McFadden were silently playing pinochle, while Kirk stared moodily out the window at the cold and drizzling rain.

The spirits of the men were at low ebb and they had met that Wednesday evening only through force of habit. Efforts to liven up the evening had been made, but with no enthusiasm, and it promised to be as dull as the weather outside.

"Why not!" suddenly muttered Kirk, half to himself and half aloud.

Barnard and McFadden turned around and eyed their companion curiously. Kirk went over to his desk and started searching for something.

Reseating himself, he read and re-read the newspaper clipping he had taken from the desk. The expression on his face was so strange that the pinochle game was abandoned and his friends attempted to learn the cause of his unusual behavior.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded McFadden, somewhat impatiently.

"Read that!" and Kirk forced the clipping into McFadden's hand.

The latter glanced at it briefly, then gave it his undivided attention and then passed it over to Barnard, who was exceedingly impatient to read it after noting its effect upon McFadden.

Barnard's expression instantly changed from one of curiosity to one of great seriousness. Kirk looked at McFadden in an effort to appraise the effect of the article, and read an excitement equal to

his own. Together they turned to Barnard, who read aloud:

**"CHICAGO, MARCH 8: The startling disclosure was made today by Chicago detectives that associates of 'Red' Murphy, gunman, who was hanged this morning, had all but succeeded in restoring Murphy to life! The request was made and granted for the body immediately after being taken from the scaffold. The body was placed in an ambulance and whirled away. Inside the ambulance, hot blankets, pulmotor and restoratives were applied until Murphy began to breathe again. The desperate attempt was futile, however, as Murphy died a few minutes after being revived."**

For at least fifteen minutes after Barnard finished not a word was spoken. Finally Kirk turned to Barnard.

"You are a doctor. What about it?"

Barnard deliberated. "Yes, it might be done if the neck was not broken by the drop. If such was the case, death would be produced by strangulation."

Gone was the boredom of the evening, and in its place was created a plan that was to write additional chapters beyond the "Finis" placed on the case of James McKay by the state. Throughout the entire night they discussed the plan—accepting and rejecting it time and time again.

There were many phases to be considered. The probability that McKay would be hanged without having his neck broken finally became the crux of the argument. Kirk suggested a plan. McFadden, as a newspaper man, would have access to the death chamber; the rope could be shortened and the knot fixing it to the scaffold could be arranged so that it would slip a bit, thereby easing the shock of the drop.

McFadden immediately protested, and refused to consider such a move. It would be torture for McKay. Barnard said:

"I could give McKay a 'shot' that would dull any pain produced."

"Jim would not stand for a hypo."

"He would not notice it, in the excitement and confusion of being bound."

Throughout the discussion of the proposed plan, the possibility of legal consequences for themselves was not considered. They were playing for the life of a friend and the ethics of the methods were of secondary importance.

By morning they had formulated and agreed upon a definite plan of procedure, and before separating they spent a few moments in anticipating the joy of the reunion, if they were successful. Although McKay had taken the life of an equally close friend, so well did they understand the conditions that they extended their sympathy rather than censure.

Day by day the details of the plan were carried out. Each was assigned a definite part of the work to be done. McFadden spent all the time he dared spend at the penitentiary. He familiarized himself with the equipment of capital punishment. He studied the tying of knots; he experimented and found the best possible way to adjust a rope so that the shock of the drop would be taken up as smoothly as possible.

Nor could a more zealous medical student be found than Barnard. He sought out every possible reference on the subject, prepared emergency equipment to the last detail.

The day before the execution, McFadden and Barnard left for Canon City, Kirk remaining in Denver. That night Kirk got out McKay's suitcase and started packing it.

McKAY was the center of the solemn little group that, with precise movement, passed down the steel corridors. They entered the death chamber, and it was McKay who sought to cheer his friends.

He stepped upon the trap, and the officials bound his wrists to his thighs with wide leather straps. He laughed and joked with his friends, who could not force a laugh from their dry set lips. Then, while the hangman stood waiting with the black hood, the chaplain offered up a few words in prayer.

McFadden stepped up and bade his friend farewell. Barnard then came up and in a strained manner clapped McKay on the shoulder and said, "So long, old scout," and then stepped down, quickly concealing a small hypodermic syringe in his pocket.

Barnard and McFadden left the room and waited just outside, where they exchanged significant glances. Each knew the other had not failed in his task. A few seconds later they heard the trap drop, and for eleven excruciating minutes—an eternity—they waited.

The prison physician pronounced McKay dead and they returned. The body was cut down quickly, then turned over to Barnard and placed in a waiting ambulance, and whirled away.

Once again the experiment was being tried.

The long chance won. After a desperate effort Barnard's work was rewarded by a slight and uncertain breathing by McKay.

McFadden noticed this, and scarcely could refrain from shouting with joy, Barnard, however, quickly assured him that the results as yet were far from certain.

The body reached the mortuary and, by well-laid plans and judicious selection of undertakers, was placed on a bed rather than the marble slab of the embalmer. Barnard watched his "patient" with close attention, while McFadden hastened to telegraph Kirk, who was waiting in Denver.

The three friends were gathered about McKay when the latter regained consciousness after hours of quiet and restful sleep. McKay opened his eyes—shut them—then, with eyes wide open, hand on his forehead, he gazed in a glassy manner about the room. His whole body quivered for a few seconds, then relaxed, and then he spoke in a hoarse and mechanical tone.

"What—" His eyes wandered about and his words became inarticulate. Finally:

"What—what has happened?"

"Steady, old man," said Barnard. "Everything is O. K. You came out fine."

Again McKay stared. "Came out? Came out of what?"

"Don't you realize—"

Barnard interrupted Kirk, and with a look warned McFadden to remain quiet.

"Never mind, old boy. Rest up a bit, and then we'll explain."

McKay was not satisfied. He asked: "Where is Jim—Jim McKay?"

*"What!"*

The three friends riveted their eyes on McKay, and slowly, first with Barnard, an expression of horror spread over their faces as they understood what had happened. The shock of being launched into eternity, only to be snatched back by his friends, had, as the law demanded, blotted out the life of McKay—*and they had brought back William Larson!*

ARMAND finished, and I turned over in my mind many questions that wanted answering.

"Is there any explanation of the transition of the personality, or soul of McKay, to that of Larson?"

"Yes," said Armand. "The brain is composed of two hemispheres, one of which receives impressions and is the seat of thinking. The other hemisphere remains thoughtless. Undoubtedly, after the normal section became somewhat paralyzed by the melancholia of those terrible nights alone in the death cell

*(Continued on page 118)*

*Ghastly Retribution Befell the Victim of*

# THE DEVIL PLANT

## *By* LYLE WILSON HOLDEN

IT WAS the last straw! Injury upon injury I had borne without a murmur, but now I determined to revenge myself upon Silvela Castelar, let the cost be what it would. His malevolent influence had pursued me since early boyhood, and it was he who caused every fond hope of my life to turn to ashes before its realization.

Long ago, when we were boys in school together, his evil work began. We were both of Spanish blood, and both, having lost our parents in childhood, were being educated by our respective guardians at one of the famous boys' schools of England.

Nothing was more natural in the circumstances, than that we should become chums and room-mates. However, it was not long before I began to be sorry that I had entered into such close relationship with him. He was absolutely unscrupulous, and soon his escapades won him an unenviable reputation among the other students, although he always managed, by skillfully covering his trial, to stand well with the authorities of the school.

Before many weeks had passed, a particularly heinous outrage, which he had committed, set the whole school in an uproar. It could not be overlooked, and a strict investigation was started.

What was my horror to discover that his devilish ingenuity had woven a web of evidence which thoroughly enmeshed me within its coils! There was no escape; I was dismissed in disgrace from the school, and in disgrace I left England. The notoriety I received in many of the leading papers of the Kingdom made it impossible for me to enter another school or to obtain any honest employment.

I came to America, working my passage over upon a cattle ship. The years that followed were hard ones, but by sober industry I forged slowly ahead until, at last, I had bright prospects of becoming the junior partner in a large business house in Baltimore.

Then my evil genius appeared. Silvela obtained employment in our company, and by his devilish cunning soon made himself well liked and trusted.

Then one morning, a few months after he came, it was reported that a large amount of money had been stolen from the firm. Again a network of circumstantial evidence pointed indisputably in my direction.

I was arrested and brought to trial. The evidence not being entirely conclusive, the jury disagreed, and I was set free; but my career in America was forever blasted.

As soon as I could close up my affairs, I buried myself in the wilds of Australia, where I began life anew. Fortune was kind to me and I prospered. Under another name, I became a respected and honored citizen of a thriving new settlement.

Then the crowning blessing of all came when I won the love of the beautiful Mercedes, a black-eyed, olive-hued immigrant from my old province of Andalusia. Then, indeed, I was at the threshold of Heaven! But how short was my day of bliss!

Four weeks before our wedding day Silvela Castelar suddenly entered our settlement. It is useless to dwell upon that wretched period. Sufficient to say that this hellborn fiend again worked his diabolic sorcery, and Mercedes was lost to me forever.

The report came to me that Silvela, for the first time in his life, loved with a fierce, consuming passion, and that Mercedes soon would be betrothed to him. Then it was that I vowed by all that was holy that Silvela Castelar should pay in full his guilty debt, even though, as a result, my soul should sink into stygian blackness.

WHY DO I write this? Because I take a grim pleasure in telling of my revenge, and because I want the world to know that I had just provocation. I am not afraid. Life or death —it matters little which is my portion now. When this is read I shall be far from the haunts of men.

Silvela Castelar thought I was a fool. It suited my purpose that he should continue to think so. I treated him as a bosom friend, and he, poor idiot, thought I never guessed that he was the instigator of the ruin which drove me from England, wrecked my business career in America, and in the end left me desolate, without hope of ever enjoying the blessings of love.

So, while we smoked, read, or hunted together, I brooded upon my wrongs, and racked by brain for some method by which I could accomplish that which was now the sole absorbing motive of my life. Then chance threw across my path the instrument of my vengeance.

One day, while I was wandering, desolate and alone, through a wild and unexplored part of the country, I came upon one of the rarest and at the same time one of the most terrible species of the vegetable kingdom ever discovered. It is known as the octopus plant, called by the natives "the devil tree." When I saw it my heart gave a throb of exultation, for I knew that my search was ended; the means by which I could accomplish my purpose was now at hand.

Silvela and I had but one passion in common—an intense love for botanical investigation. I knew that he would be interested when he heard of my strange discovery, and I believed that his knowledge of the plant was not sufficient to make him cautious. On the evening of the next day but one, as we sat smoking, I broached the subject.

"Silvela, in the old days you used to be considerably wrapped up in the study of plant life. Are you still interested?"

"Somewhat," he replied, and then his eyes narrowed craftily. "I exhaused the interesting possibilities of most of the known plants of the world a number of years ago. Lately I have found 'the light that lies in women's eyes' a subject of greater interest."

I could have strangled him where he sat; but a lifetime of trouble has taught me to conceal my feelings. I betrayed no emotion.

"I'll venture that there is one plant which you have never studied at first hand."

"What is that?" he asked, with mild curiosity.

"A plant," I continued, "found only in the most inaccessible places of the earth. Probably it could be seen only

in the wildest parts of Sumatra or Australia, and then scarcely once in a lifetime."

He was now thoroughly aroused.

"What is the family of this wonderful shrub?" he asked. "I have a dim recollection of having heard of it. Let me see—isn't it called—"

"The devil tree by the natives, by others the octopus plant, "I broke in. "But I have heard that the name is somewhat of a misnomer. It is said that it is rather a tree of heaven, for it distills a rare and delicious nectar which has a wonderful rejuvenating power. At the same time it intoxicates in a strange and mysterious manner, causing him who drinks to revel in celestial visions of love and radiant beauty. Instead of leaving one depressed, as is the case with alcohol, it is said that the impression lingers, the face grows younger, and he who sips is actually loved by any of the female sex whose eyes look upon him. Indeed, I have heard that if our countryman, Ponce de Leon, had gone to the South Seas instead of to Florida, he would have really discovered the fountain of youth for which he sought."

I looked at Silvela. His eyes were sparkling, and he was breathing quickly; I knew I had found his weak point. His was a dreamy, half-superstitious nature, and my words appealed to him strongly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Would that I could see this marvelous phenomenon and sip of its celestial juice!"

"It could be done," I replied, hesitatingly, "but it would involve some hardship and considerable danger."

"Did you ever see one of these plants?"

"Yes; not two days since."

Silvela sprang to his feet, with a Spanish oath.

"*Dios mio!*" he cried. "Rodriguez, why did you not tell me? When can we start to find it?

"Softly," I admonished. "I told you there was danger. Haven't you heard that this devil's plant has been known to gorge itself upon human flesh?"

"The wild story of some frightened native," he scoffed. "Take me to it and nothing shall prevent me from testing the fabled powers of its juices. Stop! Did you not drink of this delicious nectar?"

I shook my head sadly.

"No, I had no wish to try. Why should I seek to become young in body when my heart is old within?"

"You were afraid," he sneered, "afraid of the trailing tendrils of this plant devil."

"Have it that way if you wish," I answered indifferently. "However, if in spite of my warning, you still persist in wishing to see this strange freak of nature, I will do my best to guide you to it; but, I repeat, the way is long and difficult, and you had better leave this cursed thing alone."

"We will start in the morning," he asserted decisively, as he arose to leave.

I said nothing more, but, alone in my room, I laughed like a devil at the success of my ruse.

NEXT MORNING the weather was squally and tempestuous, and I was afraid that the fire of Silvela's enthusiasm would be burning low. But I also knew that opposition would be fuel to the flame.

"I fear we shall have to postpone our journey," I remarked, when he appeared.

If Silvela had any doubts as to the advisability of our starting out that morning, they vanished at once.

"Nonsense!" he rasped. "It is fine weather for our purpose."

"All right, my friend," I replied. "Remember, though, that I advised against going."

"The consequences be upon my head," he rejoined. "Come, let us be on our way."

Our path was strewn with difficulties, and we progressed but slowly. At times the wind howled and whistled across the wild spaces with a sound so mournful that it sent a shudder through me. The heavens were murky, and low, dark clouds raced across the leaden sky as though fleeing from some scene of horror. Great rocks impeded our progress at every step, and their grotesque forms seemed to leer at us evilly as we passed. At length Silvela paused and mopped his brow.

"Come," I exclaimed, "you are tired and exhausted. The day is declining. Let us go back."

Silvela hesitated, and there was an instant in which I was afraid he would take me at my word. Then he straightened, and his chin set determinedly.

"No. We have come far; we will continue to the end. Lead the way."

"So let it be," I returned grimly. "We will continue to the end."

I thought a tremor passed over Silvela's sturdy form and that his face paled slightly, but he turned resolutely and followed me as I pushed forward once more.

It was late in the afternoon when we approached the end of our journey. The clouds had become less dense, and the sun, hanging low upon the horizon, gleamed through with a sullen glare. The whole western sky bore the appearance of curdled blood.

At length I led the way around an immense rock, stopped, and pointed to the north. There, but a short distance ahead, stood the ghastly plant.

IT WAS, in appearance, like a huge pineapple about ten or twelve feet in height. From the top sprang the broad, dark green leaves, trailing downward to the ground and enclosing the plant in a kind of cage.

Inside these leaves, at the top of its bulky body, could be seen two round, fleshy plates, one above the other. Dripping constantly from these was a golden, intoxicating nectar, the fatal lure that tempts the victim to his fate. Surrounding these plates were long green tendrils or arms like those upon an octopus. A slight pressure upon one of these disks would cause the serpent-like tendris to enfold the victim in their deadly embrace, while the sweet fluid rendered the poor wretch oblivious to danger until it was too late.

Silvela stood for a moment silently looking at the strange plant at which I pointed.

"It is an uncanny sight," he muttered, and a shiver ran over his body.

"Uncanny it is, indeed," I replied. "I, for one, have no desire to make a closer acquaintance."

"You were always ready to show the white feather," he derided scornfully.

I did not openly resent this; I could bear insult for a little while longer.

"Silvela," I said, "Let us leave this dreadful plant alone. I implore you to return with me now. You have seen this horrid thing, why should you care to test the legendary power of the fluid which it distills?"

"Because I love," he replied in a dreamy voice, "and I wish to be loved beyond all men. If it be, indeed, the fountain of youth, what danger can deter me from sipping its miraculous juice?"

"Then I will say no more. Drink, then, of the fabled wonders of this tree of destiny, and may all the joy and all the happiness to which your life entitles you, come to you as you drink the nectar that drips in golden drops from its heart."

Silvela darted a quick look at me from his dark eyes, as though half suspecting a hidden meaning in my words. Then he stepped quickly toward the ominous plant.

"Careful!" I cautioned, "Do not touch the long, green tendrils. There is

where the danger lies, for they might tear your flesh."

Silvela stood for an instant close beside the trailing arms, his eyes glowing with a half insane light. His face was flushed with the passionate fire that surged through his veins. To his susceptible mind I know that it was the crowning adventure of his life. I could tell that his heart was pounding, from the throbbing arteries of his throat. His lips were moving, and I strained my ears to catch the sound.

"For Mercedes!" he murmured, and stepped between the hanging tendrils.

Another moment's pause, and he bent down to the fleshy plates in the heart of the plant and drank long and deeply of the golden juice. Dreamily he closed his eyes, and, leaning forward, I could faintly catch some of the broken accents that came from his lips.

"Ah, love, my only love!" he murmured, "See, beloved, the angel faces—celestial voices coming near—sweet, how sweet—the unearthly light of elysian fields—ah, the heavenly perfume—the surging of the eternal sea!"

With folded arms, I stood and waited. Lost to all else save the delights of his entrancing vision, every faculty, every sense deluded into happy quiescence by the chimerical phantasm, he did not note the tremulous vibrations which ran through the whole mass of the horrible plant.

Slowly at first, and then more quickly, the long, sinewy palpi began to rise and twist in what seemed a fearful dance of death. Higher and higher rose the dreadful arms, until they hovered over the unconscious form of their victim.

Once I pressed a little too closely, and one of the awful, twisting tendrils came in contact with my hand. I sprang back and just in time for so deadly was the grasp of the noxious arms, that the skin was stripped from my flesh.

Slowly, but surely, the octopuslike arms settled about Silvela's body. One of them dropped across his cheek. As it touched the bare flesh a tremor ran through his frame, and he suddenly opened his eyes.

It was only a moment until he was fully awake to the horror of his position. While he was reveling in dreams of paradise, the grim arms of the death plant had enclosed him in their viselike clasp, and I knew that no power upon earth could make them relax until they opened to throw forth the dry husk—the dead skin and bones—of their prey. Already they had so constricted his chest that he could breath only in short, panting gasps. His terror-stricken eyes sought my face.

"My God, Rodriguez!" he cried in a terrible voice.

The arms gripped him closer. He gasped out a word, *"Help!"*

"Silvela Castelar," I said, with quiet bitterness, "You are beyond all human aid. I could not help you if I would. Once within the grasp of those awful arms, I would be as helpless as you. Remember at every step of this fatal journey I warned you, but at each warning you grew more determined. Three times you have brought ruin upon me; the third time you left for me nothing in life, but I was resolved that you should not enjoy what I had lost. Silvela, tonight the debits and credits of your account with me stand balanced. Across the page of the book of life I write the words, *'Paid in full!'* "

He heard me through. Then, as he realized that hope was gone, shriek after terrible shriek burst from his frenzied lips. In his terror and despair, he struggled in a madness of desperation; but every movement caused the embrace of the ghastly arms to tighten upon his body.

With a sick heart, I turned from the awful scene and plunged forward on my homeward path. As I passed around the great rock from where we had first glimpsed the fatal tree, a last heart-breaking wail reached my ears.

*"Mercedes! Mercedes!"*

Like the last cry of a lost soul hovering over the abyss of gehenna, it shrilled in vibrating terror through the air, echoing back from the ghoulish rocks, and then died away into the silence of the approaching night.

A faintness seized me, and I shivered at the touch of the chilling breeze which sprang up as the sun sank, blood-red, below the horizon; and my heart was as cold as my shrinking flesh.

Sunshine or shadow—it is the same to me now. But in recompense for my shattered life, I shall carry with me always, the vision of Silvela's distorted form writhing in close embrace of the devil-tree's snaky arms, in my ears there will ever ring the echo of his last despairing cry of, *"Mercedes!"*

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# HOOTCH

### *By* William Sanford

I HAD committed murder. In a terrible fit of rage I had killed my friend, Jim McCarthy. I was going to be hung at sunrise. There was no hope. I must die.

Slowly the great steel door swung open, and four guards entered my cell. One of them stepped a little in advance of the others.

"Come!" he said, and that was all.

I rose, tottering, from my bench. I must die! I must leave the sunlight of the earth behind me. I had committed murder.

I was led through the cold, bleak prison corridors and out into the lighted courtyard where a number of people were gathered—prison officials and a few newspaper men. The scaffold stood before me, and with tottering legs I was assisted to the top.

A black cap, a horrible thing spelling death, was fitted over my head and drawn tight about my neck. All was still about me. No one spoke.

I felt the noose placed about my neck. The cold sweat broke out over my body. I could scarcely stand. Death! *Death!* I was to know the feeling of that terrible rope in a few moments.

"Ready!" said a sharp voice.

I felt the earth slip from under me, and I shot into space. A feeling of suffocation, indescribably terrible, enveloped me, and a million sparks of fire seemed dancing before my eyes, though I could not see. I tried to scream, but could make no sound. Then something seemed to burst; my lungs were free; I gave a terrible cry.

A voice from above came sharply down to me:

"What the devil's the matter with you, Bill?"

The ship gave a lurch and brought me wide awake. In the dim light of the cabin I saw Jim McCarthy's face peering at me from the bunk above.

"Jim," I said, wiping my sweat-soaked face with the sheet. "If you fill me up on any more of your home-made hootch I *will* kill you!"

# THE THUNDER VOICE

## *The Story of a Hairy Monster*

### *By* F. WALTER WILSON

IT WAS my grandfather who told me of The Thunder Voice, and of the terror which it spread throughout the Valley of Trelane away back in the early days, when scattered Indians hunted the forests thereabouts—told me of how the gruesome horror of it changed strong men into whimpering weaklings, afraid to step beyond their thesholds after dark.

Perhaps I was a morbid child, for it was on wild storm-ridden nights, when the rain splashed in sheets against the windows and the raving wind screamed dismally about the eaves of the big house, that I would climb upon his knee and beg for 'The Thunder Stories," as I had come to call them.

Full well I knew that I would later creep up the dark stairs with quaking knees, and with my heart pounding against my ribs—knew too, that I would lie awake, with the blankets drawn tightly over my head, and listen, yet dread to hear—the Thunder Voice!

The Indians had so named it—for that is what their word "Namshka" meant—but grandpa himself had heard The Thunder Voice, when he was no older than I, and he assured me that it was little akin to thunder in its tone, although it came to be known in the valley by the name the Indians had given it.

It was on the night Jeanne Delloux lad dead in the pine-wood coffin in the best room of Bartien Delloux's cabin that The Thunder Voice was first heard in the valley.

It was a custom, when one died, that neighbors would sit all night with the bereaved, to lessen somewhat the poignancy of the first smarting blows of grief. Bartien's cabin could scarce hold them all that night, for he was popular with the valley folk; and Jeanne, his wife, had been loved by young and old alike.

*"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"*

Its first notes were deep and strong, but trailed off into a shrieking scream—first loud, then dying out in a wailing whine.

The men held their breath, their questioning eyes fixed upon each other. The women screamed, and Millie Barton fainted.

Again and again it sounded, coming, it seemed, from somewhere down the valley road. At length the men found voice:

"It's a panther," suggested John Carroll. "I've heard many a one before."

"If you have, then you know that's no panther," another retorted.

Fear was written on every face but one. Old man Dodson—Old Bill Dodson, as he was known in the valley—had yet to learn what fear meant. But before another sunrise he was to know.

Shouldering his flint-lock musket, he opened the door and passed out into the pitch-black night, which now and again was illuminated by flashes of lightning, for a storm had threatened since early twilight.

Grouped about the fireplace, the others huddled together and listened, scarce breathing, for another of those cries which made the roots of one's hair to tingle, and the spine to prickle creepily. For a time it came at almost regular intervals:

*"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"*

At length a shot was heard, and several of the men spang to their feet.

"He's got it!" one cried. "Old Bill Dodson never missed a target in his life."

And, thus reassured, they stood in the doorway, listening, and then called loudly. From the black, still night there came no answer. Across the ridge the rumble of distant thunder alone broke the awful quiet.

It was near daylight when they heard a shuffling step, and, opening the door, Dodson pitched headlong across the threshold. From his hands fell the stock and barrel of his musket—broken one from the other!

Physically, the old man's injuries were slight. On his swollen neck were four blackened welts extending half way round it. Otherwise, he appeared unhurt—but his courage, his well-known bravery, was a thing of the past. For the remainder of his life the old pioneer, who had faced so many dangers, was a nerveless coward. At any unusual noise he would start in abject terror.

Questioned, he could tell but little. He had seen an object—a dark bulky *something*—in the road, and had fired. It was too dark to see clearly, but he could not have missed. Had it been of this earth it would now be dead.

After the shot it had vanished among the shadows. He was hurrying toward it when something crashed down upon him from the overhanging boughs. Long, hairy fingers closed about his throat and all went black. It was the devil himself—of that he was positive.

Even these startling events might have been forgotten, if the Voice had given an opportunity to forget. Now here, now there, it would be heard—sometimes in the direction of the ridge hills, at other times from the river growth in the lowlands. Often it seemed quite near, and dogs would bristle and whine, and lie under the beds with green-glowing eyes, as they quivered in nervous fear. The horses, too, would tremble in their stalls when the unknown monster broke the night stillness with its unearthly:

*"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"*

The valley people seldom ventured out at night; and the younger men no longer sought opportunity to boast of their bravery.

It was some weeks after Jeanne Delloux was buried that Margaret Kingsley, the young and pretty teacher of the valley school, disappeared.

It was the Carroll's who boarded her that winter, and John Carroll had gone on a trip to the lower mill. Jennie, his wife, and the teacher were alone in the cabin that night. Jennie had protested that she would not be afraid, since Margaret would be with her.

As Jennie related it, they had been seated before the fire, she engaged in darning and Margaret correcting examination papers. For a time they had been silently working when—from quite nearby—it came:

*"Boom! Boom! A-i-e-h—"*

Sick and limp from terror, Jennie's work rolled from her lap to the floor. The dog was outside, and piteously it whined and scratched at the door, but she dared not open it.

Then her attention centered on Margaret. She stood erect. Her face betrayed no sign of fear. Instead—*she smiled!*

Then, as Jennie watched, Margaret moved toward the door, opened it, and walked out into the night.

She was never seen again!

Jennie called to her frantically, but there was no reply. She had moved as one might walk in a sleep—her eyes wide open, but fixed straight before her, gazing vacantly.

Within the next three months, until about the beginning of the spring rains, other strange things occurred in the valley.

Lucy Duval met the monster at dusk one evening as she followed the path through the woods behind the Rhodes' place. She had swooned from terror, and, recovering, fled in panic to her home, fainting again from exhaustion as she reached the door. Safely within the house, she noticed for the first time that her long hair, which had been coiled upon her head, now hung unfettered. The pins and two side-combs, which had held it in place, were missing! Aside from the shock she was uninjured.

A school child, too, saw the beast as she came from school, and while it was yet daylight. Her parents went in frantic search when she failed to arrive at the usual time, and found her cringing in terror by the roadside. Her leather school-bag, containing her books and writing materials, was nowhere to be found.

It was a very long time before the child recovered from the fright inspired by "the big hairy man" as she described the monster.

Again, on a gusty, moon-haunted night, it was heard by Jule Darien and his wife—right in their yard! Had they dared, they could have looked from the window and seen it, but instead they bolted the door of their room and lay face down upon the bed—a fact they were not at all ashamed to admit.

In the morning Jule's clothing still fluttered from the rope clothes-line, which spanned between oak trees in the yard behind the cabin—but every garment belonging to his wife had disappeared! An even greater misfortune was the loss of three soft, heavy, woolen blankets. But Jule Darien and his wife considered this a trivial matter in view of the fact that they had been unharmed.

It was Delia Callahan, of all the valley folk, who found aught that was amusing in these uncanny doings.

"It's true—as ol' man Gibson's always maintained—th' devil's a woman; ain't it proven, right 'ere in th' valley?" she demanded. "An' it's an edication she's goin' to git, too. Some fine day she'll be comin' to th' school wi' her books in th' school bag, an' her hair done up wi' Lucy Duval's side-combs, an' like as not a' dressed up in Fan Darien's clothes. *Ha! Ha!*—it's too funny!" Shaken with laughter, she rocked back and forth until tears rolled from her bright blue eyes.

But she was quite alone in her mirth, for there was none who laughed with her. None dared to laugh. They feared to make sport of The Evil One.

The long winter broke at last with a protracted period of drenching rains. Never in all the experience of the valley dwellers had there been so much rain in such a length of time. Rivers could not be forded; the rich, loamy soil was washed in great patches from the fields; little gullies, usually dry, now ran brimming with muddy water. Cattle were drowned and the spring planting was long delayed.

But when the sun again broke through the gray clouds people began to remark that for a long time they had not heard The Thunder Voice.

As a matter of fact it was never heard again.

## II

SO RAN the stories, and so often did my grandfather tell them, in order to humor my childish demands, that at length I could repeat them all—just as he told them, and almost word for word.

One by one, the years dropped into history, and recollection of "The Thunder Stories" came to me but rarely; and brought, instead of thrills of horror, only a mild amusement, as I would reflect on them as folk-lore of the Valley of Trelane.

But, there was the disappearance of Margaret Kingsley. That was difficult to explain away. A normal, healthy young woman walks out into the night and is never seen again!

Hunters accustomed to trailing animals and Indians utterly failed in their efforts to find her, or to track this evil monster to its lair. Often its spoor was plainly marked—a four-toed foot of unfamiliar shape. Bloodhounds had been brought from a distant settlement; but, as with the human hunters, the trail ended at the base of a huge white-oak tree. There the dogs looked up and whined; they could follow the scent no further.

Along with fairy tales, and stories of grim giants, told to me in childhood days, these stories of the Thunder Voice might have passed into hazy forgetfulness, but for a grisly reminder which occurred while I was studying to become a physician.

In the college I found much interest in visiting the library and poring over bound volumes of *The Medical Journal.* Some of these dated back to many years before my birth.

It was while reading one of these that I suddenly started into quickened interest at sight of a familiar name—*Bartien Delloux!*

For a few moments I could not recall where I had heard the name, and then came back to me my grandfather's stories. I pictured again, as I had often done before, the log cabin peopled with sympathetic neighbors come to console Bartien Delloux. The dead body of his wife in an adjoining room. The dull rumble of distant thunder, with now and again flashes of lightning. And then, suddenly, from out the black night—The Thunder Voice!

It was he—the same Bartien Delloux—his name handed down on these age-brown pages in a history of most unusual kind.

A physician had told the tale in plain matter-of-fact language. Briefly it was as follows:

A patient, who said his name was Bartien Delloux, lay dying in a charity hospital. He asked for a priest. The priest remained with him until he died. Then, coming to the doctor, the priest had remarked:

"I think that man's story is of more concern to your profession than to mine. I'm sorry you didn't hear it."

"How so?" the doctor inquired.

"Well, because it dealt with the bodily, not the spiritual side of life. It was not confided to me under the sanctity of the confessional, for the man had nothing to confess in the matter. He simply wanted my opinion, and if possible some comforting assurance. Given under these conditions I can repeat it to you."

Urged by the doctor, the priest continued:

"At one time the man lived in one of the Eastern Townships of the Province of Quebec, in a district known as the Valley of Trelane. Once a year it was his custom to go to Quebec and market his stock of furs, for, like others who dwelt in the valley, he combined the pursuit of farmer with that of a hunter and trapper.

"On one such trip his wife accompanied him. This was against his wishes, since the journey at that early day was beset with dangers and hardships.

"One day, as they walked about the city, they came upon a tentshow, stationed on a vacant lot. Outside the tent,

banners announced the exhibition of a so-called 'wild-man,' said to have been captured in the jungles of Africa. They visited this show, and from Delloux's description the creature was evidently a huge gorilla.

"After a brief look at the ugly thing, Dellox made to go away, but his wife would not consent to leave. Fascinated, she stared between the iron bars, and the hideous-featured animal crept close to her, and crooned and gently whined as it gazed at her with little black beady eyes, which peeped from its black wrinkled face.

"At length Delloux induced his wife to accompany him. As she moved away the animal became violent. Tearing frantically at the iron bars, it growled and screamed. So vigorously did it shake the bars that it seemed the cage must fall to pieces. The owner of the show urged them to leave quickly.

"They returned to their home, and later, when their child was born, it resembled—in miniature—the gorilla!"

"It is not an impossible instance of pre-natal influence," the doctor remarked.

"Perhaps not," replied the priest, "but there are incidents pertaining to its later life which I fancy are quite unusual."

The priest's story was resumed:

"In spite of the ugliness of the half-beast the mother loved it dearly. She realized, however, that it must not be seen by the neighbors, and in consequence it was kept in the cellar, but when it grew older was allowed to roam about at night. Always it returned before daylight, and crept to its bed in a corner of the cellar.

"Bright metal, and keen-edged tools, appeared to fascinate it, and due to this the father first learned of its amazing strength.

"Delloux possessed a long-bladed knife which he valued highly, and he was using it one day in skinning a fox when his wife called to him. The knife was left lying beside the half-skinned carcass of the animal. When he returned, both had disappeared!

"Entering the cellar, he found the beast cutting apart the body of the fox and greedily eating it. It had never liked him; and when he approached and made as though to take away the knife it rose and, with a shove of its long arm, sent Dellox sprawling through the open doorway. When he picked himself up the creature faced him from the door, and growled menacingly.

"It was then but ten years old.

"Delloux was a strong man, but his strength was a puny thing when matched against this powerful brute. The knife was abandoned to it thereafter.

"From that day on, it refused to eat cooked food; but at night went into the forest and killed game, which it carried home and ate raw.

"A few words of the French language it was able to learn, but not enough to permit of continued conversation.

"Finally, on the night when Delloux's wife lay dead, it went forth, never to return to the cabin. That night, as Delloux's neighbors were gathered about his fireside in friendly condolence, strange cries were heard—unlike those of any animal known to the vicinity. It inspired them with a superstitious terror—and Delloux did not dare to make known to them what he believed to be the real origin of the dread sounds.

"After that night the weird, unearthly cries were repeated on many nights, and throughout the valley people came to believe that The Evil One himself had come among them.

"Delloux alone knew the truth.

"There were strange occurrences in the valley that winter, but whether the thing was responsible for them or not, Delloux could not say. Some claimed to have seen it. Perhaps they had.

"Finishing his story, the dying man begged me for assurance that this curse put upon him did not signify that his soul was lost, and I did for him what the Holy Church prescribes in cases of similar kind."

There followed a lengthy report of the discussion by other physicians. Some argued that the story was untrue—impossible. Others considered it quite within the bounds of possibility.

I closed the volume and gave myself over to reflection on the strangeness of this tale. Assuming that it were true, the mystery of The Thunder Voice was explained. But only in part, for many questions hurtled through my mind as this story recalled them.

What about Margaret Kingsley's disappearance? Where had the beast lived after it left Delloux's home? Why had it indulged in the queer doings which were so meaningless and puzzling? Why did it voice those terrifying cries which frightened the usually brave pioneers? And, finally, what had happened to still the awful Thunder Voice, leaving the valley people to regain their wonted equanimity?

At length I gave over the futile questioning.

## *III.*

AGAIN a measure of years slipped by, and I was nearing my fortieth birthday. I had succeeded in my profession. I was happily married.

In the busy interest of full-lived days, the tales of The Thunder Voice were again relegated to a place alongside the story of Jack-the-Giant-Killer and other legends of the kind. But subconsciously, behind my sane, sunlit life, there lurked a strong desire to know the truth—*all* the truth—about this strange affair; for, try as I might, I could not catalogue it with mythical legends, for somehow I *believed* Delloux's story.

It was about this time that I received a letter from a solicitor, who resided in a small town to the north of Quebec, informing me that a relative—a man named Carroll—had died without making a will, and search had established that I was the next of kin, and his estate would therefore come to me.

I was greatly surprised, but on reflection I recalled having once heard that the Carrolls, who lived in Trelane Valley were distantly related to me. At that time I had given the information no serious attention.

In order to settle the matter I went to interview the solicitor, and for the first time in my life visited Trelane Valley. A broad fertile valley it was; now beautified by acres of waving grain. Along the road on which I motored were scattered substantial homes of the prosperous farmers.

The legal formalities had been concluded, and I had signed my name to the last of several documents when I had a visit from a stranger.

He informed me that he was a Civil Engineer employed by the railway company whose line ran through the valley. Davis was his name. His company wished to build a water-tank nearby, and the only available water supply which had been discovered was a large spring, which he understood was located on land now owned by me. The company wished to lease the water rights, and obtain permission to construct a pump house near the spring.

At his suggestion, I went with him to view the location of the spring, and decide what I should do regarding his proposition.

As we walked along the railway track he pointed out the location selected for the tank, and then, leaving the right-of-way, we descended a gentle slope and, turning sharply to the left, came before the face of an outcropping ledge of gray, lichened stone.

A large, almost circular, hole appeared in the cliff, and as we stood before it, there lay, a few feet beneath us, a pool of bright clear water. The roof of the hole pitched downward at a uniform slope to where it met the level of the water.

The deal was quickly arranged, and a lease of the water rights drawn up and signed.

I returned to Montreal and resumed my work.

But it was a matter of only a few weeks until I was again called to Trelane Valley. A letter from the railway company informed me that the supply of water in the spring had failed, and they wished to cancel the lease.

The letter invited me to come and see for myself, and a few days later I again stood at the mouth of the huge hole which opened into the upright face of the cliff.

But now the water had receded until, from the entrance, one could discern only a black pool, far underground. The hole in the cliff was now the entrance to a cave of impressive dimensions. The shaft pitched downward at a gentle slope, and I could see that the roof of the cave now hung clear, above the water.

Through mud and slime we waded along the floor of the cavern until we reached the water's edge. Davis carried a flashlight, which he turned into the further depth. On the other side of the water the floor sloped upward until it became lost in the gloom beyond the reach of the light.

Somewhat past the opposite edge of the water, I made out two objects—bulky, and but dimly defined against the black floor.

"What do you think they are?" I asked Davis.

"Loose boulders—flaked off from above. Stones are always dropping from the roof of caves."

This suggestion left me unsatisfied. Of course, such stones might be of almost any shape, and yet the outline of those objects did not suggest the chance figure of loose stones.

Curiosity mastered me, but I was silent.

Returning to the village, the cancellation of the lease was soon effected. The very next day the pumping engine was hauled away, and the board shack which housed it was torn down and removed. A few pieces of its timber framing were left lying about—some of substantial cross-section, and some pieces of board.

This I noticed with satisfaction, for they would prove useful in carrying out my determination to explore the cave.

## *IV.*

THAT night, while the village people slept, I walked to the cave. I was eqiupped with a hammer, some nails, and an electric flashlight.

From the refuse lumber of the pump-house I constructed a raft, and with a pole to propel it, easily crossed the pool of water, and stepped out into the muddy slime which covered the upward slope of the cave floor.

Although encrusted with mud, it was at once apparent that one of the objects I had come to examine was a human skeleton.

But, *such* a skeleton!

Short of stature it was, with a barrel-like chest of prodigious size. The arms reached well below the knees. The skull was of unusual thickness and abnormal shape.

It required no effort of imagination to recall the stories of The Thunder Voice. Such a frame must have housed lungs of a power far surpassing that of any ordinary human being. I could easily conjecture the vocal might this creature had possessed when this skeleton had housed a living organism.

The other object was a boat—of most unusual build.

It was constructed from rough slabs which had apparently been hewn from solid timbers with an ax. It was flat-bottomed, with square ends which sloped upward. The pieces were fastened together by wooden pegs driven through roughly cut holes.

I turned from the boat and, climbing the sloping floor, roved my light about as I continued my exploration. A little further along the floor under my feet became dry, and then the cave turned abruptly to the left. Just beyond this turn I stumbled over something.

It, too, was a skeleton!

Different in every particular from the first, however. Its living tenant had been fairly tall, and with a well-proportioned figure. The cave was quite dry here, and only a light dust covered the yellowed bones.

My interest quickened. There had been *two* tenants in this unknown cave! One, I felt sure, had been the son of Bartien Delloux—the creature with The Thunder Voice. But who had shared this dark cavern with him?

Inch by inch, I examined the floor, the walls, and even the roof of the cavern. There was little to be seen—some bones of small animals, the rusted blade of an axe, portions of rotted fur, and in a nook opening out from the main cave were some scattered fibers of decayed cloth.

Finally, when I was on the point of turning about to leave the place, I found something which fired me with renewed interest. It was a small bottle of flattish shape. The bottom was covered with dry, black, flaky particles—dried ink, I surmised.

In a crevasse of the rock I found a rotted leather bag, which fell to pieces at my touch. From it dropped several articles, but eagerly I seized upon one—an age-yellowed, thin, paper book; such as school-children, even to this day, use for writing exercises.

Gingerly I turned the leaves, for the paper was brittle with age. The pages were filled with writing—but no childish scrawl, this!

The penmanship was exquisite—of that type affected by ladies of a generation long past—the letters narrow and slanting, yet as clear and distinct as those on a printed page.

Carefully I tucked the book inside my coat, and with all possible haste made my way back to the village hotel.

LOCKING the door of my room, I opened the book, and the words upon its first page brought me to a startled attention:

*"Why am I, Margaret Kingsley, the child of good, honorable parents, living now in a cave, eating raw meat, existing as a savage—my mate, a hideous creature whose very sight would disgust and appall the people I have heretofore known?*

*"The answer is, that I am here because I WANT to be here. Since the night when he called to me, and I went forth to be carried here in his arms, I have had many chances to escape, but I CHOOSE TO REMAIN!*

*"Ugly he is, beyond argument, but I love him for his giant strength, and for the tenderness he shows me—a tenderness exceeding that of a mother for her child. Within his misshapen body is a heart starved for affection—and that I am glad to give.*

*"Only a few words of French can he speak, and yet he quickly grasps my unspoken wishes and tries to gratify them.*

*"This book, the quill, the ink with which I write this, belonged to one of my pupils. The other night he brought them to me, in the bag containing her school books. How he obtained them I know not. Secretly I had longed for the materials with which to write—not that human eyes*

*(Continued on page 118)*

# CASE No. 27

## *A Few Minutes in a Madhouse*

### *By* MOLLIE FRANK ELLIS

DOCTOR MAYNARD paused midway of the long hospital corridor and waved an inclusive hand toward its twin rows of iron-barred cells.

"This, Wayne," he said, "is the Psychopathic Ward. We have some unusual cases here. Take, for instance, Number Twenty-Seven. I'm sure you will be interested in Number Twenty-Seven. Step this way."

I obeyed with reluctance. I was concerned with Maynard, not his psychopathic cases. We had not seen each other since our college days, twenty years before, and I had hoped for a return of our old intimacy during these few hours together, which chance had thrown in my way.

I had knocked about the world, acquiring the kaleidoscopic knowledge of life accorded the globe-trotter. Maynard had stayed at home, tinkering with the mental workings of the human machinery until his name stood for the accom-

plishment of amazing things in the realm of psychopathy. Each had run true to form: Maynard's passion was to make the wheels go round; mine to wonder why they went.

"This is Number Twenty-Seven," Maynard continued, as he stopped before a cell door. "I'll let her tell her own story. . . . Good morning, Mrs. Howard. How are you this morning?"

At his words, a woman slowly rose from a bench against the far wall of the cell. Then, abruptly, she made a sudden rush that ended in a frantic shaking of the iron bars of the cell door where we stood.

"Doctor Maynard! You're a-goin to let me out, ain't you? You're a-goin' to let me go home an' rub Jim's head so's he can sleep? Jim cain't sleep unless I rub his head for him. You know he cain't, Doctor! I've told you so, often."

"Yes, yes. You've told me often, Mrs. Howard." Maynard gave me a significant glance. "But tell me again, please. Maybe I will understand better this time and let you go."

The woman strained her gaunt body against the cell door. She seemed in a torture of anxiety, obsessed by a vital current of emotion in sharp contrast to the pitiful meagerness of her personality.

She wore a cheap cotton dress; her hair was plain about her sharp face; and there was written upon her countenance that look of repression, of negation of all right to exist as an individual, which marks the poorer type of rural woman.

It seemed for a moment as if she would break into a torrent of words; then abruptly she fell back, silent, and the heartbreak in her eyes were succeeded by a slow-growing horror. Yet her tragedy, whatever it might be, brought with it a certain dignity which she had hitherto lacked. Her attenuated homeliness forbade distinction, yet when she made pitiful apology to Maynard, a certain nobility of soul shone from her eyes.

"I'd forgot for a minute, Doctor Maynard, that I'd killed Jim. I'd forgot that I hated him. I was thinkin' he was alive and that I loved him like I used to before the children was killed. I'm a wicked woman—the wickedest woman that ever lived; but I wouldn't be in this penitentiary if Jim could a-slept without havin' to have his head rubbed."

Maynard touched my foot at the word "penitentiary."

"That's all right, Mrs. Howard." His voice seemed unnecessarily loud and cheerful against the thin anguish of her tones. "Tell me about the childrun. How were they killed?"

"THEY was run over, Doctor."

No words can describe the deadness of her voice, as of a fierce pain burnt out for lack of fuel for further endurance.

"It was the poultry truck that goes by the farm every morning. Milly was too little to know not to git in the road, an' Jacky run out to grab her back an' he fell, Jacky did. 'Twasn't nobody's fault, Doctor. The man that drives the truck, he always waved at the children as he passed, and he most went crazy when it happened. An' Milly was too little to know better; an' Jackie done the best he could—only six years old.

"But afterwards me an' Jim couldn't sleep. At first we did, a night or two, 'cause we was all wore out with the funeral and such; but after the kinfolks was gone we couldn't. We could see their faces—Milly's and Jacky's.

"Then, after a while, Jim got so's he didn't see 'em so bad, an' he said he could 'a'slept, only for me. He said I ought to be a-gittin 'over it some; an' I reckon I should 'a' been. I tried to, but it didn't do no good. Mebby 'twas because they was just the two of 'em an' both goin' at once.

"Jim got right fretful at me. He said a man couldn't work on a farm an' not sleep. He was right, too. Jim always was sensible.

"One night after I had worritted him considerable, a-cryin', I found out that I could put him to sleep by rubbin' his forehead, slow an' firm; an' so I done it right along every night after that an' he slept fine. I was glad, 'cause Jim was a hard worker an' a good provider; an' a man can't work on a farm an' not sleep.

"But somehow, after Jim had got to sleep of nights, things seemed a heap lonesomer. Mebby if we'd lived nearer to the neighbors 'twould 'a' helped some. 'Twas so awful still, nights, out where we lived; an' the moon come in at the winder so white an' all . . .

"Times, just before dawn, I'd git to wonderin' if it would 'a' happened if I'd 'a' been out in the front yard, a-watchin' out for the childern, instead of washin' back in the kitchen. And I'd git to shakin' all over an' couldn't stop. Once I waked Jim up and begged him to talk to me; but he said it wouldn't help none for two of us to be losin' our sleep, so I never done it any more. Jim always was sensible.

"At last I got so the work 'round the house dragged on me until I was afraid I couldn't git things done. I told Jim about it and he was sorry. But he said a woman's work didn't matter so much—it could be let go—but a man had to make the livin'.

"Even with the work and all, I never wanted night to come. I'd git all scared when it come on dusk. Jim didn't like it. He said it wasn't no way to welcome a man home after a hard day's work; an' it wasn't. I done my best, but somehow I couldn't laugh much or be lovin'; so Jim took to drivin' to town after supper was over. He hadn't never done that before the children was killed.

"Some times he'd stay real late. Me not bein' used to bein' left alone made it worse, too. Somtimes I'd git so tired waitin' up for him I'd feel like I could go to sleep right then. But of course I couldn't, account of havin' to rub his head. You see, he'd got to dependin' on it, an', as he said, a man had to have his sleep or he couldn't work.

"All this time, Doctor, I was lovin' Jim an' tryin' to git along the best I could. I knowed I'd been lucky to git Jim. He was a good man. He never took tantrums like Pa. We'd never dared cross Pa at home 'cause he was excitable-like; an' finally he went crazy. They would a-took him to the asylum, I reckon, only he died.

"Mebby I'd 'a' got so's I could a-slept after a while, only 'bout this time it come on to October, when the fall winds begin to blow, an' the house would creak of nights—kind of little breakin' noises like babies whisperin' . . . An' the shadows of the leaves on our big tree outside the winder kept twistin' about on the walls like little hands a-pushin' against coffin lids, a-tryin' to git out an' go back an' find their mammy's breasts."

SHE stopped abruptly and stood in tense stillness—as if she were back in that hushed house of sorrow, with its sharp noises and its tiny, mother-seeking shadow-hands upon the walls—listening to the silence, the unendurable silence, of the waning hours.

Doctor Maynard made a restless movement. With a start, the woman came back to realities and turned to us once more.

"I didn't git to hatin' Jim, Doctor, until after I took to usin' them pills they gave Ma when she was on her deathbed. She died, leavin' a bottle of 'em on the kitchen shelf—morphine, they call 'em. One night, when I just couldn't stand it no longer, I thought of them an' I got one an' it helped a lot."

She paused, apparently musing upon how much it had helped. Then she went on:

" 'Twas along about then that I got to hatin' Jim, lookin' at him sleepin' so hard, his face all red an' his mouth open. 'Twasn't that so much, though, Doctor, 'cause I always thought Jim was nice-lookin' even though he was coarse complected. But he got to havin' restless spells, wakin' up along of cock-crowin' time, 'bout when I'd got my pill an' had kind of quit shakin' over the shadows an' things. Then I'd have to rouse up to 'em again an' rub him to sleep once more. I got to wonderin' if he'd die right off, without it's hurtin' him none, if I'd press down hard on them soft spots in his temples. Seem like havin' to do it any more would be more'n I could bear—"

She stopped again as if re-living her torture; perhaps slipping once more like a white wraith from bedroom to kitchen shelf and back again, to stand looking down upon her husband's sprawled figure, battling against the up-surge of desire to crush out the life beneath her hands and be forever free from her hideous task!

" . . . I didn't kill Jim, though, Doctor, until them pills give out. I reckon mebby I wouldn't never have done it if they hadn't give out. But after that . . . sometime after that I killed Jim. I pressed down—down . . ."

Maynard waited until he was sure she had finished; then he spoke in a commanding tone.

*"Mrs. Howard!"*

Startled, she stared at us as if seeing us for the first time. She grasped the cell door and shook it in a frenzy of anxiety.

"Doctor Maynard! You're a-goin' to let me out, ain't you? You're a-goin' to let me go home an' rub Jim's head for him so's he can sleep? Jim cain't sleep unless I rub his head! I've told you so often, Doctor . . ."

MAYNARD drew me away; but that pleading voice followed us down the length of the corridor, thin, anguished—

I hurried.

When we had closed the door of the Psychopathic Ward behind us, Maynard said:

"Now that's the interesting part of it—that last—to a psychologist. Did you note that she still loves him, whenever she comes out from under her obsession about killing him?"

"Didn't she kill him?" I asked.

"Not at all. You see, when she could get no more of the drug, her grief and her loss of sleep 'turnd her brain,' as you laymen would say. Remember what she said about 'Pa'."

I battled with my bewilderment at this unexpected turn of the affair.

"But I don't understand!" I stammered.

"Probably not. I shall try to explain it, as simply as possible and without using scientific terms. You see, she had *wanted* to kill him for so long—had gone over the manner of it so often in her silent vigils—that when at last her conscious mind became unbalanced the resisted desire took its revenge by becoming a subconscious obsession, which announced itself an accomplished fact. It is an interesting sidelight on psychopathy, don't you think?"

I did not. I changed the subject.

"What became of the man—her husband? How did he take it?"

"Well. Very well, indeed. Level-headed fellow. Of course, he was upset at first over her condition; but when we made it clear to him that she was incurable he calmed down. He went home and slept on it for a night or two—"

"How do you suppose," I broke in (I really could not resist asking it)—"How do you suppose he got to sleep without—"

" . . . And then he applied for a divorce," continued Maynard, ignoring my childish rudeness. "He wants to marry again, but, of course, our laws—"

*"Marry!"*

Maynard frowned. "One can see his point of view."

"Yes; to be sure. And our laws . . . quite unsympathetic—"

Maynard dismissed the matter with a magnanimous gesture. Also, his kindling eye bespoke a concentration of interest which ignored the trivial. He peered at me eagerly.

"What would you think, Wayne—I am studying the case, and I ask for information—would you be led to believe that her reason for wanting to kill him was a subconscious sensing of that trait in him, that eagerness to be rid of whatever irked him, regardless of his responsibilities? Or, on the other hand, would you think it a flair of sex antagonism—resentment that he, unlike herself, could resume a normal existence so soon after an emotional cataclysm?"

I fumbled my hat and turned toward the door. I wanted to get away.

"My time is up, Maynard," I said hastily. "Sorry, but I must go. Glad to have had this visit with you. Awfully proud to have been the classmate of a celebrity, you know, and all that. But I really cannot follow your scientific subtleties. If you mean do I think his cruelty drove her mad—"

Maynard threw up his hands. "Oh you laymen!" he laughed. "But come in again, Wayne. Any time you're passing through town. Glad to see you always. We have some very interesting cases here."

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# Deaf and Blind Students Perform Miracles

**WIDE attention has been attracted by two students at Northwestern University, one of them stone blind, the other deaf and dumb, by reason of their marvelous demonstrations in "seeing" and "hearing." Wiletta Huggins, deaf and dumb, can hear with her fingertips, or by placing a pole against a speaker's chest and feeling the vibrations. Professor Robert H. Gault is conducting a series of experiments with her that may eventually lead to teaching deaf mutes to talk. No less remarkable are the achievements of the blind student, Carl Bostrom, who has so trained his facial nerves and ears that he can "see" things that are denied those who have the use of their eyes. In a crowded court room, he could tell, by the sound of a prisoner's voice, whether or not he was telling the truth. Also, with uncanny accuracy, he told the dimensions of the room, located the doors and windows, and calmly announced that on one side of the room only men were standing, and on the other only women.**

**"I can tell by the sounds," he said—"little sounds that most people miss. There is a difference in the noises made by men and women."**

**A reporter asked him how many persons there were in the court.**

**He listened acutely, then said, "Seventy-five."**

**The reporter guessed one hundred. Another guess estimated the number at sixty. The persons in the room were counted. There were exactly eighty two.**

# The Finale

## *By* WM. MERRIT

THORNTON STOWE was always a puzzle to me. Very methodical in everything from early childhood, he always seemed utterly devoid of impulsive emotion. The only thing he ever did that really surprised me was to suddenly declare, one evening, that he loved Josephine Thralton and was betrothed to her.

Soon, vague rumors about Stowe's private life were breathed around town, and his fianceé married Lakeland; the thick lipped, pock marked, red nosed political boss of the town, whose character was known and unquestioned, and about which each citizen held a private, unvoiced opinion.

I left town shortly after the wedding, and all that I heard of Stowe after that was a newspaper account of his killing Lakeland. I then wrote him the only letter since my departure; but knew him too well to expect an answer.

I returned, unannounced, one dreary afternoon in November. Quickening my steps as I left the depot, I turned toward the roller mill, which to the world was Stowe's sole vocation, but to me, only his avocation for the purpose of defraying expenses of the work in his private chemical laboratory.

I had left him experimenting with an explosive gas which was more powerful and much cheaper than the most modern gunpowder. But it corroded every metal known, except gold. If he could only find some means of eliminating this fault, his fortune would be made.

As I hurried through the heart of town, a lone pedestrian, who seemed to shudder at the doleful dirge of the bare tree limbs overhead, and to shrink from looking at the gloomy, leaden skies beyond, approached with stooped shoulders and bowed head. It was Thornton Stowe; but he had so changed since I had seen him last that, had he not spoken, I would have passed him by. On the instant of recognition I was about to greet him cheerfully, but there was such an air of pathos in his whole bearing that I merely walked up and gripped his hand. It was as listless as his spirits, and he looked into my eyes with a silent appeal that sickened my soul to think of the emotions that impelled it.

Finally I ventured, "How's business in the old town now, Thornt?" I had almost asked: "What's the trouble?" but remembered that he had killed Lakeland in July and, although he had been cleared on the plea of "self defense" I felt a delicacy in arousing such reminiscences in a man of his temperament.

His reply puzzled me:

"Let's go on home to dinner. I've got to tell it to somebody."

He left me to my conjectures the rest of the way to his home, a large gray brick house, a mansion for that little town, where he lived alone with a faithful old negro man, an ex-slave, who prepared his meals and kept the house in order. The untrimmed ivy on the walls of the old antibellum home was in keeping with the neglected condition of the house, which looked now like an old deserted castle. There was no light in the front windows, although it was long after sundown. As we approached, my spirits were damped with awe at the weird aspect. A premonition of horror haunted me and it was only by a tremendous effort that I refrained from making some excuse to go immediately to the hotel.

THE door swung open noiselessly and easily and Stowe switched on the lights in the hall. Everything was green, the sickly, poisonous green of a stagnant tarn. The grim monotony of the hideous color, and the suddenness with which the horrible aspect was revealed was appalling. The curtains were green, the walls were green, the woodwork and furniture were all green. With each turn of my head I was confronted by nothing but that nauseating hue. My head swam. The ghastly invariable color seemed to be pressing my eyeballs back into their sockets and irresistibly closing ever closer and closer around me with its overwhelming and unbroken density. The dull light from the green globe that hung in the center of the hall seemed to stifle me. I was on the point of rushing back to the street in frantic terror.

We disposed of our coats and hats without a word and walked back to the library. Again everything was the same ghastly green. The impelling terror of aggravated claustraphobia rushed back upon me with redoubled fury. I could not by force of will power, nor by artifice of reason, shake off the uncanny dread that haunted me; but was now determined to stay.

Drinks were served, and my host then addressed me for the first time since we had started home from the street; merely:

"Help yourself."

He reached eagerly for a green bottle on the tray, drank two glasses of absinthe from it, then rested his elbows on the table and stared steadily at me for a few moments.

The real specter now rose before me: had he killed Lakeland for self defense or was it merely the diabolic fancy of a lunatic? If, with the precise cunning of a maniac, he had devised a scheme so intricate and flawless that it had baffled even the eye witnesses, then I was at the mercy of a man, known to have the power of thought impelled by passions and emotions and not controlled by reason.

He began in an even hollow voice:

"I guess you know why I killed Lakeland."

"I heard they found 'self defense,'" I admitted.

He swallowed a glass of wine at a gulp, then sneered with a note of irony:

"Unquestionable evidence. Lakeland is the only man who has ever even suspected that I intended to kill him when I shook hands with him.

"You can guess the first thing he did: but he was Josephine's husband before I learned who started those stories. I felt that she hadn't given me a fair chance to disprove all he had said and I resolved to forget her; but when I saw her getting paler and thinner because of the life she had to live, I couldn't help feeling a sympathy for her. When Lakeland wanted to buy back the mill I had bought from his father because he had found it to be the best paying business in town, I was fool enough to tell him I'd trade with him if he would stop drinking. Of course he just told me to go to hell with my morals and threw all his money into an effort to kill my business.

"I played the game with him until all my men suddenly refused to work

longer, and refused to explain why. That was too much; I shoved a pistol into my pocket and went in search of him that very afternoon. When I found him, he was, as usual, beastly drunk. To shoot him then would convict me of murder in the first degree. Besides, I couldn't snuff his life out that way if my revenge was to be sweet. He must know about it, for half the delight of revenge would be in knowing that I had made him suffer without its costing me a thing."

I was amazed at the mad man's logic; for mad he certainly was.

"Of course," he went on, "I thought first of my chemistry. He would some to liquor like a hog to slop. A little potassium cyanide in it and he would simply drop dead. There would be no symptoms of poison and the coroner's verdict would be 'heart failure.' But I never drank with him and could not afford to make a special occasion for poisoning him. I merely walked by.

" 'Hello.' he grunted. 'Looks like I'll have to run you clear out of town to get that mill. It isn't half as easy to take away as your girl was.'

"Several heard it; and I wouldn't have changed a word he said if I had had the power.

"The very next day Lewis Dalton came into the mill and told me that Lakeland was inquiring for me down in town. 'And he's sober today.' he added. What better could I ask? I shoved a wrench into my pocket—that would be easily enough explained—and started immediately to town. I met him just as I turned the corner on to Main Street. There were several people in sight, but none within a hundred feet of us."

STOWE'S expression had been gradually changing ever since he had begun his story. Now he was completely transformed. He leaned far over the table toward me, every muscle tense, his eyes snapping with a steely glint that made me shudder to see. I took another drink of wine, but, for the first time, he seemed to forget his completely. His lips drew in a thin, straight, colorless line as he hissed with diabolic vehemence:

"I held out my hand to him civilly enough, but spoke before he took it. I didn't call him Lakeland that time either, I called him by his right name, the name he's deserved ever since this world has been cursed with his damned green eyed face. His hand went straight into his coat under his arm, but I was ready for him. I grabbed his wrist and shoved him back against the wall. As soon as he saw the wrench in my other hand he realized that I was going to kill him, and the damned coward got so weak in the legs that he didn't even try to get away. He groaned like a calf when I hit him right over the temple. But his eyes; they still had enough of the devil in them to look at me even while he was falling, and say: 'You're not ahead yet, even with this.' "

He reached again for the green bottle and I offered no protest. Although he had already had enough for two men, anything would be better than his present condition.

"I didn't even know that she was sick when I killed him," he continued. "When they told me, I went straight to the house. She was dying—dying, and that brute was down in town just walking around the streets while she was calling for him and begging him to come to her! She recognized me as soon as I got into the room and seemed to know all.

" 'Where is Jim?' she begged me to tell her.

"I didn't answer her. I couldn't.

" 'Will I have to go to him?' she cried; and she never spoke again, and never took her eyes from mine. She is still looking straight into my eyes. And since she died," he groaned, "her eyes have gotten as green as his."

"Then why, in the name of Heaven, have you made everything in the house green?" I asked, reminded once more of our hideous surroundings.

"So that I couldn't see them here. But every way I turn they are looking straight at me. Sometimes they almost blaze when I try to look away."

There was but one chance for him now: he must have some diversion. I forgot that I had come to stay this time.

"Say, Thornt," I suggested, "come with me for a few weeks hunting in the mountains. It's been two years since you and I were together on a trip."

He sat for a moment in deep thought, his face twitching convulsively, his eyes staring into vacancy.

"I am going to get out of this town," he finally asserted.

I reached my hand across the table to him. He hesitated as though he didn't understand, but finally took it with the same grasp he had given me on the street when he recognized my sympathy for him, and with the same pathetic appeal in his eye, gripped it until I winced.

While I still pondered over the situation he straightened up resolutely, as though he had finally reached a determination. With a desperate effort to control the emotion that now convulsed his whole being, he addressed me in a dry, husky voice:

"Frank, excuse me for a moment; and as we have always been friends, don't think hard of me tonight."

I nodded an assent and he walked slowly to a door at the far side of the room, passed through and closed it.

As soon as I found myself alone, the grim horror of my surroundings attacked me with reinforced fury. The dread of my wretched host's insanity became more intense with him in the next room on a mysterious mission, at which he had asked me not to be offended. Not even the slightest sound proceeded now from the room he had entered. The changeless monotony of the omnipresent green was enhanced by the oppressive silence that reigned throughout the house, save for the intolerable tick of the old clock that stood on the floor in the corner, and seemed to pause indefinitely after each stroke, measuring eternity instead of time.

I had never seen inside that room more than half a dozen times in my whole life. There was nothing in there to go for. It had been used as a store room for old furniture ever since I could remember. Finally the suspense grew unbearable. I rose impulsively, went hastily to the door through which he had passed and flung it open.

The room had been cleared of its junk and remodeled into a neat little laboratory. Thornton stood at the far side of a table in the center of the floor, pouring absinthe into a glass that was sitting perilously near the edge. With the glass half full he placed the bottle on the table. It tilted and rolled off; but he paid it no heed. Supporting himself with one hand and raising the glass in the other, he seemed aware of my presence for the first time.

"Frank," he gasped huskily, "no one but you knows; and they will never guess."

I remembered in a flash, what he had said of his abandoned plan to poison Lakeland, and realized; but before I could reach him he had drained the glass. It slipped from his fingers and shattered on the floor. He stood for a moment, staring on past me into space.

I grasped the edge of the table for support and felt the cold sweat start on my brow and weakening limbs.

"Green as hell!" he muttered; and flinging his arms across his fixed eyes, crumpled to the floor; then stiffened, stark and dead.

For minutes I stood motionless, powerless to move.

Finally, tossing a burning match into the spilt liquor, I answered his last and only plea:

"No, Thornt, they shall never know."

*Here's Proof of the Love of the Weird and Mysterious in the Eighteenth Century*

# THE CLOSED CABINET

## By _____ _____

I.

IT was with a little alarm and a good deal of pleasurable excitement that I looked forward to my first grown-up visit to Mervyn Grange. I had been there several times as a child, but never since I was twelve years old, and now I was over eighteen. We were all of us very proud of our cousins the Mervyns: it is not everybody that can claim kinship with a family who are in full and admitted possession of a secret, a curse, and a mysterious cabinet, in addition to the usual surplusage of horrors supplied in such cases by popular imagination. Some declared that a Mervyn of the days of Henry VIII had been cursed by an injured abbot from the foot of the gallows. Others affirmed that a dissipated Mervyn of the Georgian era was still playing cards for his soul in some remote region of the Grange. There were stories of white ladies and black imps, of bloodstained passages and magic stones. We, proud of our more intimate acquaintance with the family, naturally gave no credence to these wild inventions. The Mervyns, indeed, followed the accepted precedent in such cases, and greatly disliked any reference to the reputed mystery being made in their presence; with the inevitable result that there was no subject so pertinaciously discussed by their friends in their absence. My father's sister had married the late Baronet, Sir Henry Mervyn, and we always felt that she ought to have been the means of imparting to us a very complete knowledge of the family secret. But in this connection she undoubtedly failed of her duty. We knew that there had been a terrible tragedy in the family some two or three hundred years ago—that a peculiarly wicked owner of Mervyn, who flourished in the latter part of the sixteenth century, had been murdered by his wife who subsequently committed suicide. We knew that the mysterious curse had some connection with this crime, but what the curse exactly was we had never been able to discover. The history of the family since that time had indeed in one sense been full of misfortune. Not in every sense. A coal mine had been discovered in one part of the estate, and a populous city had grown over the corner of another part; and the Mervyns of today, in spite of the usual percentage of extravagant heirs and political mistakes, were three times as rich as their ancestors had been. But still their story was full of bloodshed and shame, of tales of duels and suicides, broken hearts and broken honor. Only these calamities seemed to have little or no relation to each other, and what the precise curse was that was supposed to connect or account for them we could not learn. When she first married, my aunt was told nothing about it. Later on in life, when my father asked her for the story, she begged him to talk upon a pleasanter subject; and being unluckily a man of much courtesy and little curiosity, he complied with her request. This, however, was the only part of the ghostly traditions of her husband's home upon which she was so reticent. The haunted chamber, for instance—which, of course, existed at the Grange—she treated with the greatest contempt. Various friends and relations had slept in it at different times, and no approach to any kind of authenticated ghost-story, even of the most trivial description, had they been able to supply. Its only claim to respect, indeed, was that it contained the famous Mervyn cabinet, a fascinating puzzle of which I will speak later, but which certainly had nothing haunting or horrible about its appearance.

My uncle's family consisted of three sons. The eldest, George, the present baronet, was now in his thirties, married, and with children of his own. The second, Jack, was the black-sheep of the family. He had been in the Guards, but, about five years back, had got into some very disgraceful scrape, and had been obliged to leave the country. The sorrow and the shame of this had killed his unhappy mother, and her husband had not long afterwards followed her to the grave. Alan, the youngest son, probably because he was the nearest to us in age, had been our special favorite in earlier years. George was grown up before I had well left the nursery, and his hot, quick temper had always kept us youngsters somewhat in awe of him. Jack was four years older than Alan, and, besides, his profession had, in a way, cut his boyhood short. When my uncle and aunt were abroad, as they frequently were for months together on account of her health, it was Alan, chiefly, who had to spend his holidays with us, both as schoolboy and as undergraduate. And a brighter, sweeter-tempered comrade, or one possessed of more diversified talents for the invention of games or the telling of stories, it would have been difficult to find.

For five years together now our ancient custom of an annual visit to Mervyn had been broken. First there had been the seclusion of mourning for my aunt, and a year later for my uncle; then George and his wife, Lucy—she was a connection of our own on our mother's side, and very intimate with us all—had been away for nearly two years on a voyage round the world; and since then sickness in our own family had kept us in our turn a good deal abroad. So that I had not seen my cousins since all the calamities which had befallen them in the interval, and as I steamed northwards I wondered a good deal as to the changes I should find. I was to have come out that year in London, but ill-health had prevented me; and as a sort of consolation Lucy had kindly asked me to spend a fortnight at Mervyn, and be present at a shooting-party, which was to assemble there in the first week of October.

I had started early, and there was still an hour of the short autumn day left when I descended at the little wayside station, from which a six-mile drive brought me to the Grange. A dreary drive I found it—the round, gray, treeless outline of the fells stretching around me on every side beneath the leaden, changeless sky. The night had nearly fallen as we drove along the narrow valley in which the Grange stood: it was too dark to see the autumn tints of the woods which clothed and brightened its sides, almost too dark to distinguish the old tower—Dame Alice's tower as it was called—which stood some half mile farther on at its head. But the light shown brightly from the Grange windows, and all feeling of dreariness departed as I drove up to the door. Leaving maid and boxes to their fate, I ran up the steps into the old, well remembered hall, and was informed by the dignified man-servant that her ladyship and the tea were awaiting me in the morning room.

I found that there was nobody staying in the house except Alan, who was finishing the long vacation there: he had been called to the bar a couple of years before. The guests were not to arrive for another week, so that I had plenty of opportunity in the interval to make up for lost time with my cousins. I began my observations that evening as we sat down to dinner, a cozy party of four. Lucy was quite unchanged—pretty, foolish, and gentle as ever. George showed the full five years' increase of age, and seemed to have acquired a somewhat painful control of his temper. Instead of the old petulant outbursts, there was at times an air of nervous, irritable self-restraint, which I found the less pleasant of the two. But it was in Alan that the most striking alteration appeared. I felt it the moment I shook hands with him, and the impression deepened that evening with every hour. I told myself that it was only the natural difference between boy and man, between twenty and twenty-five, but I don't think that I believed it. Superficially the change was not great. The slight-built, graceful figure; the deep gray eyes, too small for beauty; the clear-cut features, the delicate, sensitive lips, close shaven now, as they had been hairless then—all were as I remembered them. But the face was paler and thinner than it had been, and there were lines round the eyes and at the corners of the mouth which were no more natural to twenty-five than they would have been to twenty. The old charm indeed—the sweet friendliness of manner, which was his own peculiar possession—was still there. He talked and laughed almost as much as formerly, but the talk was manufactured for our entertainment, and the laughter came from his head and not from his heart. And it was when he was taking no part in the conversation that the change showed most. Then the face, on which in the old time every passing emotion had expressed itself in a constant, living current, became cold and impassive—without interest, and without desire. It was at such times that I knew most certainly

that here was something which had been living and was dead. Was it only his boyhood? This question I was unable to answer.

Still, in spite of all, that week was one of the happiest in my life. The brothers were both men of enough ability and cultivation to be pleasant talkers, and Lucy could perform adequately the part of conversational accompanist which, socially speaking, is all that is required of a woman. The meals and evenings passed quickly and agreeably; the mornings I spent in unending gossips with Lucy, or in games with the children, two bright boys of five and six years old. But the afternoons were the best part of the day. George was a thorough squire in all his tastes and habits, and every afternoon his wife dutifully accompanied him round farms and coverts, inspecting new buildings, trudging along half-made roads, or marking unoffending trees for destruction. Then Alan and I would ride by the hour together over moor and meadowland, often picking our way homewards down the glen-side long after the autumn evenings had closed in. During these rides I had glimpses many a time into depths in Alan's nature of which I doubt whether in the old days he had himself been aware. To me certainly they were as a revelation. A prevailing sadness, occasionally a painful tone of bitterness, characterized these more serious moods of his, but I do not think that, at the end of that week, I would, if I could, have changed the man, whom I was learning to revere and to pity, for the light-hearted playmate whom I felt was lost to me forever.

*II.*

The only feature of the family life which jarred on me was the attitude of the two brothers towards the children. I did not notice this much at first, and at all times it was a thing to be felt rather than to be seen. George himself never seemed quite at ease with them. The boys were strong and well grown, healthy in mind and body; and one would have thought that the existence of two such representatives to carry on his name and inherit his fortune would have been the very crown of pride and happiness to their father. But it was not so. Lucy indeed was devoted to them, and in all practical matters no one could have been kinder to them than was George. They were free of the whole house, and every indulgence that money could buy for them they had. I never heard him give them a harsh word. But there was something wrong. A constraint in their presence, a relief in their absence, an evident dislike of discussing them and their affairs, a total want of that enjoyment of love and possession which in such a case one might have expected to find. Alan's state of mind was even more marked. Never did I hear him willingly address his nephews, or in any way allude to their existence. I should have said that he simply ignored it, but for the heavy gloom which always overspread his spirits in their company, and for the glances which he would now and again cast in their direction—glances full of some hidden painful emotion, though of what nature it would have been hard to define. Indeed, Alan's attitude towards her children I soon found to be the only source of friction between Lucy and this otherwise much-loved member of her husband's family. I asked her one day why the boys never appeared at luncheon.

"Oh, they come when Alan is away," she answered; "but they seem to annoy him so much that George thinks it is better to keep them out of sight when he is here. It is very tiresome. I know that it is the fashion to say that George has got the temper of the family; but I assure you that Alan's nervous moods and fancies are much more difficult to live with."

That was on the morning—a Friday it was—of the last day which we were to spend alone. The guests were to arrive soon after tea; and I think that with the knowledge of their approach Alan and I prolonged our ride that afternoon beyond its usual limits. We were on our way home, and it was already dusk, when a turn of the path brought us face to face with the old ruined tower, of which I have already spoken as standing at the head of the valley. I had not been close up to it yet during this visit at Mervyn. It had been a very favorite haunt of ours as children, and partly on that account, partly perhaps in order to defer the dreaded close of our ride to the last possible moment, I proposed an inspection of it. The only portion of the old building left standing in any kind of entirety was two rooms, one above the other. The tower room, level with the bottom of the moat, was dark and damp, and it was the upper one, reached by a little outside staircase, which had been our rendezvous of old. Alan showed no disposition to enter, and said that he would stay outside and hold my horse, so I dismounted and ran up alone.

The room seemed in no way changed. A mere stone shell, littered with fragments of wood and mortar. There was the rough wooden block on which Alan used to sit while he first frightened us with bogey-stories, and then calmed our excited nerves by rapid sallies of wild nonsense. There was the plank from behind which, erected as a barrier across the doorway, he would defend the castle against our united assault, pelting us with fir cones and sods of earth. This and many a bygone scene thronged on me as I stood there, and the room filled again with he memories of childish mirth. And following close came those of childish terrors. Horrors which had oppressed me then, wholly imagined or dimly apprehended from half-heard traditions, and never thought of since, flitted around me in the gathering dusk. And with them it seemed to me as if there came other memories too,—memories which had never been my own, of scenes whose actors had long been with the dead, but which, immortal as the spirit before whose eyes they had dwelt, still lingered in the spot where their victim had first learnt to shudder at their presence. Once the ghastly notion came to me, it seized on my imagination with irresistible force. It seemed as if from the darkened corners of the room vague, ill-defined shapes were actually peering out at me. When night came they would show themselves in that form, livid and terrible, in which they had been burnt into the brain and heart of the long ago dead.

I turned and glanced towards where I had left Alan. I could see his figure framed in by the window, a black shadow against the gray twilight of the sky behind. Erect and perfectly motionless he sat, so motionless as to look almost lifeless, gazing before him down the valley into the illimitable distance beyond. There was something in that stern immobility of look and attitude which struck me with a curious sense of congruity. It was right that he should be thus—right that he should be no longer the laughing boy who a moment before had been in my memory. The haunting horrors of that place seemed to demand it, and for the first time I felt that I understood the change. With an effort I shook myself free from these fancies, and turned to go. As I did so, my eye fell upon a queer-shaped painted board, leaning up against the wall, which I well recollected in old times. Many a discussion had we had about the legend inscribed upon it, which in our wisdom we had finally pronounced to be German, chiefly because it was illegible. Though I had loudly professed my faith in this theory at the time, I had always had uneasy doubts on the subject, and now half smiling I bent down to verify or remove them. The language was English, not German; but the badly painted, faded Gothic letters in which it was written made the mistake excusable. In the dim light I had difficulty even now in deciphering the words, and felt when I had done so that neither the information conveyed nor the style of the composition was sufficient reward for the trouble I had taken. This is what I read:

"Where the woman sinned the maid shall win;
But God help the maid that sleeps within."

What the lines could refer to I neither had any notion nor did I pause then even in my own mind to inquire. I only remember vaguely wondering whether they were intended for a tombstone or for a doorway. Then, continuing my way, I rapidly descended the steps and remounted my horse, glad to find myself once again in the open air and by my cousin's side.

The train of thought into which he had sunk during my absence was apparently an absorbing one, for to my first question as to the painted board he could hardly rouse himself to answer.

"A board with a legend written on it? Yes, he remembered something of the kind there. It had always been there, he thought. He knew nothing about it,"—and so the subject was not continued.

The weird feelings which had haunted me in the tower still oppressed me, and I proceeded to ask Alan about that old Dame Alice whom the traditions of my childhood represented as the last occupant of the ruined building. Alan roused himself now, but did not seem anxious to impart information on the subject. She had lived there, he admitted, and no one had lived there since. "Had she not," I inquired, "something to do with the mysterious cabinet at the house? I remember hearing it spoken of as 'Dame Alice's cabinet.'"

"So they say," he assented; "she and an Italian artificer who was in her service, and who, chiefly I imagine on account of his skill, shared with her the honor of reputed witchcraft."

"She was the mother of Hugh Mervyn, the man who was murdered by his wife, was she not?" I asked.

"Yes," said Alan, briefly.

"And had she not something to do with the curse?" I inquired after a short pause, and nervously I remembered my father's experience on that subject, and I had never before dared to allude to it in the presence of any member of the family. My nervousness was fully warranted. The gloom on Alan's brow deepened, and after a very short "They say so" he turned full upon me, and inquired with some asperity why on earth I had developed this sudden curiosity about his ancestress.

I hesitated a moment, for I was a little ashamed of my fancies; but the darkness gave me courage, and besides I was not afraid of telling Alan—he would understand. I told him of the strange sensations I had had while in the tower—sensations which had struck me with all that force and clearness which we usually associate with a direct experience of fact. "Of course it was a trick of imagina-

tion," I commented; "but I could not get rid of the feeling that the person who had dwelt there last must have had terrible thoughts for the companions of her life."

Alan listened in silence, and the silence continued for some time after I had ceased speaking.

"It is strange," he said at last; "instincts which we do not understand form the motive-power of most of our life's actions, and yet we refuse to admit them as evidence of any external truth. I suppose it is because we *must* act somehow, rightly or wrongly; and there are a great many things which we need not believe unless we choose. As for this old lady, she lived long—long enough, like most of us, to do evil; unlike most of us, long enough to witness some of the results of that evil. To say that, is to say that the last years of her life must have been weighted heavily enough with tragic thought."

I gave a little shudder of repulsion.

"That is a depressing view of life, Alan," I said. "Does our peace of mind depend only upon death coming early enough to hide from us the truth? And, after all, can it? Our spirits do not die. From another world they may witness the fruits of our lives in this one."

"If they do," he answered with sudden violence, "it is absurd to doubt the existence of a purgatory. There must in such a case be a terrible one in store for the best among us."

I was silent. The shadow that lay on his soul did not penetrate to mine, but it hung round me nevertheless, a cloud which I felt powerless to disperse.

After a moment he went on,—"Provided that they are distant enough, how little, after all, do we think of the results of our actions! There are few men who would deliberately instill into a child a love of drink, or wilfully deprive him of his reason; and yet a man with drunkenness or madness in his blood thinks nothing of bringing children into the world tainted as deeply with the curse as if he had inoculated them with it directly. There is no responsibility so completely ignored as this one of marriage and fatherhood, and yet how heavy it is and far-reaching."

"Well," I said, smiling, "let us console ourselves with the thought that we are not all lunatics and drunkards."

"No," he answered; "but there are other evils besides these, moral taints as well as physical, curses which have their roots in worlds beyond our own,—sins of the fathers which are visited upon the children."

He had lost all violence and bitterness of tone now; but the weary dejection which had taken their place communicated itself to my spirit with more subtle power than his previous mood had owned.

"That is why," he went on, and his manner seemed to give more purpose to his speech than hitherto,—"that is why, so far as I am concerned, I mean to shirk the responsibility and remain unmarried."

I was hardly surprised at his words. I felt that I had expected them, but their utterance seemed to intensify the gloom which rested upon us. Alan was the first to arouse himself from its influence.

"After all," he said, turning round to me and speaking lightly, "without looking so far and so deep, I think my resolve is a prudent one. Above all things, let us take life easily, and you know what St. Paul says about 'trouble in the flesh,'—a remark which I am sure is specially applicable to briefless barristers, even though possessed of a modest competence of their own. Perhaps one of these days, when I am a fat old judge, I shall give my cook a chance if she is satisfactory in her clear soups; but till then I shall expect you, Evie, to work me one pair of carpet-slippers per annum, as tribute due to a bachelor cousin."

I don't quite know what I answered,—my heart was heavy and aching,—but I tried with true feminine docility to follow the lead he had set me. He continued for some time in the same vein; but as we approached the house the effort seemed to become too much for him, and we relapsed again into silence.

This time I was the first to break it. "I suppose," I said, drearily, "all those horrid people will have come by now."

"Horrid people," he repeated, with rather an uncertain laugh, and through the darkness I saw his figure bend forward as he stretched out his hand to caress my horse's neck. "Why Evie, I thought you were pining for gayety, and that it was, in fact, for the purpose of meeting these 'horrid people' that you came here."

"Yes, I know," I said, wistfully; "but somehow the last week has been so pleasant that I cannot believe that anything will ever be quite so nice again."

We had arrived at the house as I spoke, and the groom was standing at our horses' heads. Alan got off and came round to help me to dismount; but instead of putting up his arm as usual as a support for me to spring from, he laid his hand on mine. "Yes, Evie," he said, " it has been indeed a pleasant time. God bless you for it." For an instant he stood there looking up at me, his face full in the light which streamed from the open door, his gray eyes shining with a radiance which was not wholly from thence. Then he straightened his arm, I sprang to the ground, and as if to preclude the possibility of any answer on my part, he turned sharply on his heel, and began giving some orders to the groom. I went on alone into the house, feeling, I knew not and cared not to know why, that the gloom had fled from my spirit, and that the last ride had not after all been such a melancholy failure as it had bid fair at one time to become.

### *III.*

In the hall I was met by the housekeeper, who informed me that, owing to a misunderstanding about dates, a gentleman had arrived whom Lucy had not expected at that time, and that in consequence my room had been changed. My things had been put into the East Room,—the haunted room,—the room of the Closed Cabinet, as I remembered with a certain sense of pleased importance, though without any surprise. It stood apart from the other guest-rooms, at the end of the passage from which opened George and Lucy's private apartment; and as it was consequently disagreeable to have a stranger there, it was always used when the house was full for a member of the family. My father and mother had often slept there: there was a little room next to it, though not communicating with it, which served for a dressing-room. Though I had never passed the night there myself, I knew it as well as any room in the house. I went there at once, and found Lucy superintending the last arrangements for my comfort.

She was full of apologies for the trouble she was giving me. I told her that the apologies were due to my maid and to her own servants rather than to me; "and besides," I added, glancing round, "I am distinctly a gainer by the change."

"You know, of course," she said, lightly, "that this is the haunted room of the house, and that you have no right to be here?"

"I know it is the haunted room," I answered; "but why have I no right to be here?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "There is one of those tiresome Mervyn traditions against allowing unmarried girls to sleep in this room. I believe two girls died in it a hundred and fifty years ago, or something of that sort."

"But I should think that people, married or unmarried, must have died in nearly every room in the house," I objected.

"Oh, yes, of course they have," said Lucy; "but once you come across a bit of superstition in this family, it is of no use to ask for reasons. However, this particular bit is too ridiculous even for George. Owing to Mr. Leslie having come to-day, we must use every room in the house: it is intolerable having a stranger here, and you are the only relation staying with us. I pointed all that out to George, and he agreed that, under the circumstances, it would be absurd not to put you here."

"I am quite agreeable," I answered; "and, indeed, I think I am rather favored in having a room where the last recorded death appears to have taken place a hundred and fifty years ago, particularly as I should think that there can be scarcely anything now left in it which was here then, except, of course, the cabinet."

The room had, in fact, been entirely done up and refurnished by my uncle, and was as bright and modern-looking an apartment as you could wish to see. It was large, and the walls were covered with one of those white and gold papers which were fashionable thirty years ago. Opposite us, as we stood warming our backs before the fire, was the bed—a large double one, hung with a pretty shade of pale blue. Material of the same color covered the comfortable modern furniture, and hung from gilded cornices before the two windows which pierced the side of the room on our left. Between them stood the toilet-table, all muslin, blue ribbons, and silver. The carpet was a gray and blue Brussels one. The whole effect was cheerful, though I fear inartistic, and sadly out of keeping with the character of the house. The exception to these remarks was, as I had observed, the famous closed cabinet, to which I have more than once alluded. It stood against the same wall of the room as that in which the fireplace was, and on our right—that is, on that side of the fireplace which was farthest from the windows. As I spoke, I turned to go and look at it and Lucy followed me. Many an hour as a child had I passed in front of it, fingering the seven carved brass handles, or rather buttons, which were ranged down its center. They all slid, twisted, or screwed with the greatest ease, and apparently like many another ingeniously contrived lock; but neither I nor any one else had ever yet succeeded in sliding, twisting, or screwing them after such a fashion as to open the closed doors of the cabinet. No one yet had robbed them of their secret since first it was placed there three hundred years ago by the old lady and her faithful Italian. It was a beautiful piece of workmanship, was this tantalizing cabinet. Carved out of some dark foreign wood, the doors and panels were richly inlaid with lapis-lazuli, ivory, and mother-of-pearl, among which were twisted delicately chased threads of gold and silver. Above the doors, between them and the cornice, lay another mystery, fully as tormenting as was the first. In a smooth strip of wood about an inch wide, and extending along the whole breadth of the cabinet, was

inlaid a fine pattern in gold wire. This at first sight seemed to consist of a legend or motto. On looking closer, however, though the pattern still looked as if it was formed out of characters of the alphabet curiously entwined together, you found yourself unable to fix upon any definite word, or even letter. You looked again and again, and the longer that you looked the more certain became your belief that you were on the verge of discovery. If you could approach the mysterious legend from a slightly different point of view, or look at it from another distance, the clew to the puzzle would be seized, and the words would stand forth clear and legible in your sight. But the clew never had been discovered, and the motto, if there was one, remained unread.

For a few minutes we stood looking at the cabinet in silence, and then Lucy gave a discontented little sigh. "There's another tiresome piece of superstition," she exclaimed; "by far the handsomest piece of furniture in the house stuck away here in a bedroom which is hardly ever used. Again and again have I asked George to let me have it moved downstairs, but he won't hear of it."

"Was it not placed here by Dame Alice herself?" I inquired a little reproachfully, for I felt that Lucy was not treating the cabinet with the respect which it really deserved.

"Yes, so they say," she answered; and the tone of light contempt in which she spoke was now pierced by a not unnatural pride in the romantic mysteries of her husband's family. "She placed it here, and it is said, you know, that when the closed cabinet is opened, and the mysterious motto is read, the curse will depart from the Mervyn family."

"But why don't they break it open?" I asked, impatiently. "I am sure that I would never have remained all my life in a house with a thing like that, and not found out in some way or another what was inside it."

"Oh, but that would be quite fatal," answered she. "The curse can only be removed when the cabinet is opened as Dame Alice intended it to be, in an orthodox fashion. If you were to force it open, that could never happen, and the curse would therefore remain forever."

"And what is the curse?" I asked, with very different feelings to those with which I had timidly approached the same subject with Alan. Lucy was not a Mervyn, and not a person to inspire awe under any circumstances. My instincts were right again, for she turned away with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"I have no idea," she said. "George and Alan always look portentously solemn and gloomy whenever one mentions the subject, so I don't. If you ask me for the truth, I believe it to be a pure invention, devised by the Mervyns for the purpose of delicately accounting for some of the disreputable actions of their ancestors. For you know, Evie," she added, with a little laugh, "the less said about the character of the family into which your aunt and I have married the better."

The remark made me angry, I don't know why, and I answered stiffly, that as far as I was acquainted with them, I at least saw nothing to complain of.

"Oh, as regards the present generation, no,—except for that poor, wretched Jack," acquiesced Lucy, with her usual imperturbable good-humor.

"And as regards the next?" I suggested, smiling, and already ashamed of my little temper.

"The next is perfect, of course,—poor dear boys." She sighed as she spoke, and I wondered whether she was really as unconscious as she generally appeared to be of the strange dissatisfaction with which her husband seemed to regard his children. Anyhow the mention of them had evidently changed her mood, and almost directly afterwards, with the remark that she must go and look after her guests, who had all arrived by now, she left me to myself.

For some minutes I sat by the bright fire, lost in aimless, wandering thought, which began with Dame Alice and her cabinet, and which ended somehow with Alan's face, as I had last seen it looking up at me in front of the hall-door. When I had reached that point, I roused myself to decide that I had dreamt long enough, and that it was quite time to go down to the guests and to tea. I accordingly donned my best teagown, arranged my hair, and proceeded towards the drawing-room. My way there lay through the great central hall. This apartment was approached from most of the bedrooms in the house through a large, arched doorway at one end of it, which communicated directly with the great staircase. My bedroom, however, which, as I have said, lay among the private apartments of the house, opened into a passage which led into a broad gallery, or upper chamber, stretching right across the end of the hall. From this you descended by means of a small staircase in oak, whose carved balustrade, bending round the corner of the hall, formed one of the prettiest features of the picturesque old room. The barrier which ran along the front of the gallery was in solid oak, and of such a height that, unless standing close up to it, you could neither see nor be seen by the occupants of the room below. On approaching this gallery I heard voices in the hall. They were George's and Alan's, evidently in hot discussion. As I issued from the passage, George was speaking, and his voice had that exasperated tone in which an angry man tries to bring to a close an argument in which he has lost his temper. "For heaven's sake leave it alone, Alan; I neither can nor will interfere. We have enough to bear from these cursed traditions as it is, without adding one which has no foundation whatever to justify it—a mere contemptible piece of superstition."

"No member of our family has a right to call any tradition contemptible which is connected with that place, and you know it," answered Alan; and though he spoke low, his voice trembled with some strong emotion. A first impulse of hesitation which I had had I checked, feeling that as I had heard so much it was fairer to go on, and I advanced to the top of the staircase. Alan stood by the fireplace facing me, but far too occupied to see me. His last speech had seemingly aroused George to fury, for the latter turned on him now with savage passion.

"Damn it all, Alan!" he cried, "can't you be quiet? I will be master in my own house. Take care, I tell you; the curse may not be quite fulfilled yet after all."

As George uttered these words, Alan lifted his eyes to him with a glance of awful horror: his face turned ghastly white; his lips trembled for a moment; and then he answered back with one half-whispered word of supreme appeal—"George!" There was a long-drawn, unutterable anguish in his tone, and his voice, though scarcely audible, penetrated to every corner of the room, and seemed to hang quivering in the air around one after the sound had ceased. Then there was a terrible stillness. Alan stood trembling in every limb, incapable apparently of speech or action, and George faced him, as silent and motionless as he was. For an instant they remained thus, while I looked breathlessly on. Then George, with a muttered imprecation, turned on his heel and left the room. Alan followed him as he went with dull lifeless eyes; and as the door closed he breathed deeply, with a breath that was almost a groan.

Taking my courage in both hands, I now descended the stairs, and at the sound of my footfall he glanced up, startled, and then came rapidly to meet me.

"Evie! you here," he said; "I did not notice you. How long have you been here?" He was still quite white, and I noticed that he panted for breath as he spoke.

"Not long," I answered, timidly, and rather spasmodically; "I only heard a sentence or two. You wanted George to do something about some tradition or other,—and he was angry,—and he said something about the curse."

While I spoke Alan kept his eyes fixed on mine, reading through them, as I knew, into my mind. When I had finished he turned his gaze away satisfied, and answered very quietly, "Yes, that was it." Then he went back to the fireplace, rested his arm against the high mantelpiece above it, and leaning his forehead on his arm, remained silently looking into the fire. I could see by his bent brow and compressed lips that he was engaged upon some earnest train of thought or reasoning, and I stood waiting—worried, puzzled, curious but above all things, pitiful, and oh! longing so intensely to help him if I could. Presently he straightened himself a little, and addressed me more in his ordinary tone of voice, though without looking round. "So I hear they have changed your room."

"Yes," I answered. And then, flushing rather, "Is that what you and George have been quarreling about?" I received no reply, and taking this silence for assent, I went on deprecatingly, "Because you know, if it was, I think you are rather foolish, Alan. As I understand, two girls are said to have died in that room more than a hundred years ago, and for that reason there is a prejudice against putting a girl to sleep there. That is all. Merely a vague, unreasonable tradition."

Alan took a moment to answer.

"Yes," he said at length, speaking slowly, and as if replying to arguments in his own mind as much as to those which I had uttered. "Yes, it is nothing but a tradition after all, and that of the very vaguest and most unsupported kind."

"Is there even any proof that girls have not slept there since those two died?" I asked. I think that the suggestion conveyed in this question was a relief to him, for after a moment's pause, as if to search his memory, he turned round.

"No," he answered, "I don't think that there is any such proof; and I have no doubt that you are right, and that it is a mere prejudice that makes me dislike your sleeping there."

"Then," I said, with a little assumption of sisterly superiority, "I think George was right, and that you were wrong."

Alan smiled,—a smile which sat oddly on the still pale face, and in the wearied, worn-looking eyes. "Very likely," he said; "I daresay that I am superstitious. I have had things to make me so." Then coming nearer to me, and laying his hands on my shoulders, he went on, smiling more brightly, "We are a queer-tempered, bad-nerved race, we Mervyns, and you must not take us too seriously, Evie. The best thing that you can do with our odd ways is to ignore them."

"Oh, I don't mind," I answered, laughing, too glad to have won him back to even temporary brightness, "as long as you and George don't come to blows over the question of where I am to sleep; which after all is chiefly my concern, —and Lucy's."

"Well, perhaps it is," he replied, in the same tone; "and now be off to the drawing-room, where Lucy is defending the tea-table single-handed all this time."

I obeyed, and should have gone more cheerfully had I not turned at the doorway to look back at him, and caught one glimpse of his face as he sank heavily down into the large arm-chair by the fireside.

However, by dinner-time he appeared to have dismissed all painful reflections from his mind, or to have buried them too deep for discovery. The people staying in the house were, in spite of my sense of grievance at their arrival, individually pleasant, and after dinner I discovered them to be socially well assorted. For the first hour or two, indeed, after their arrival, each glared at the other across those triple lines of moral fortification behind which every well-bred Briton takes refuge on appearing at a friend's country-house. But flags of truce were interchanged over the soup, an armistice was agreed upon during the roast, and the terms of a treaty of peace and amity were finally ratified under the sympathetic influence of George's best champagne. For the achievement of this happy result Alan certainly worked hard, and received therefor many a grateful glance from his sister-in-law. He was more excited than I had ever seen him before, and talked brilliantly and well—though perhaps not as exclusively to his neighbors as they may have wished. His eyes and his attention seemed everywhere at once: one moment he was throwing remarks across to some despairing couple opposite, and the next he was breaking an embarrassing pause in the conversation by some rapid sally of nonsense addressed to the table in general. He formed a great contrast to his brother, who sat gloomy and dejected, making little or no response to the advances of the two dowagers between whom he was placed. After dinner the younger members of the party spent the evening by Alan's initiative, and chiefly under his direction, in a series of lively and rather riotous games such as my nursery days had delighted in, and my schoolroom ones had disdained. It was a great and happy surprise to discover that, grown up, I might again enjoy them. I did so, hugely, and when bedtime came all memories more serious than those of "musical chairs" or "follow my leader" had vanished from my mind. I think, from Alan's glance as he handed me my bed candle, that the pleasure and excitement must have improved my looks.

"I hope you have enjoyed your first evening of gayety, Evie," he said.

"I have," I answered, with happy conviction; "and really I believe that it is chiefly owing to you, Alan." He met my smile by another; but I think that there must have been something in his look which recalled other thoughts, for as I started up the stairs I threw a mischievous glance back at him and whispered, "Now for the horrors of the haunted chamber."

He laughed rather loudly, and saying "Good-night, and good-luck," turned to attend to the other ladies.

His wishes were certainly fulfilled. I got to bed quickly, and—as soon as my happy excitement was sufficiently calmed to admit of it—to sleep. The only thing which disturbed me was the wind, which blew fiercely and loudly all the earlier portion of the night, half arousing me more than once. I spoke of it at breakfast the next morning; but the rest of the world seemed to have slept too heavily to have been aware of it.

## *IV.*

The men went out shooting directly after breakfast, and we women passed the day in orthodox country-house fashion,—working and eating; walking and riding; driving and playing croquet; and above, beyond, and through all things, chattering. Beyond a passing sigh while I was washing my hands, or a moment of mournful remembrance while I changed my dress, I had scarcely time even to regret the quiet happiness of the week that was past. In the evening we danced in the great hall. I had two valses with Alan. During a pause for breath, I found that we were standing near the fireplace, on the very spot where he and George had stood on the previous afternoon. The recollection made me involuntarily glance up at his face. It looked sad and worried, and the thought suddenly struck me that his extravagant spirits of the night before, and even his quieter, careful cheerfulness of to-night, had been but artificial moods at best. He turned, and finding my eyes fixed on him, at once plunged into conversation, discussed the peculiarities of one of the guests, good-humoredly enough, but with so much fun as to make me laugh in spite of myself. Then we danced again. The plaintive music, the smooth floor, and the partner were all alike perfect, and I experienced that entire delight of physical enjoyment which I believe nothing but a valse under such circumstances can give. When it was over I turned to Alan, and exclaimed with impulsive appeal, "Oh, I am so happy,—you must be happy too!" He smiled rather uncertainly, and answered, "Don't bother yourself about me, Evie, I am all right. I told you that we Mervyns had bad nerves; and I am rather tired. That's all." I was passionately determined just then upon happiness, and his was too necessary to mine for me not to believe that he was speaking the truth.

We kept up the dancing till Lucy discovered with a shock that midnight had struck, and that Sunday had begun, and we were all sent off to bed. I was not long in making my nightly preparations, and had scarcely inserted myself between the sheets when, with a few long moans, the wind began again, more violently even than the night before. It had been a calm, fine day, and I made wise reflections as I listened upon the uncertainty of the north-country climate. What a tempest it was! How it moaned, and howled, and shrieked! Where had I heard the superstition which now came to my mind, that borne upon the wind come the spirits of the drowned, wailing and crying for the sepulture which had been denied them? But there were other sounds in that wind, too. Evil, murderous thoughts, perhaps, which had never taken body in deeds, but which, caught up in the air, now hurled themselves in impotent fury through the world. How I wished the wind would stop. It seemed full of horrible fancies, and it kept knocking them into my head, and it wouldn't leave off. Fancies, or memories—which?—and my mind reverted with a flash to the fearful thoughts which had haunted it the day before in Dame Alice's tower. It was dark now. Those ghastly intangible shapes must have taken full form and color, peopling the old ruin with their ageless hideousness. And the storm had found them there and borne them along with it as it blew through the creviced walls. That was why the wind's sound struck so strangely on my brain. Ah! I could hear them now, those still living memories of dead horror. Through the window crannies they came shrieking and wailing. They filled the chimney with spirit sobs, and now they were pressing on, crowding through the room,—eager, eager to reach their prey. Nearer they came;—nearer still! They were round my bed now! Through my closed eyelids I could almost see their dreadful shapes; in all my quivering flesh I felt their terrors as they bent over me,—lower, lower.

With a start I aroused myself and sat up. Was I asleep or awake? I was trembling all over still, and it required the greatest effort of courage I had ever made to enable me to spring from my bed and strike a light. What a state my nerves or my digestion must be in! From my childhood the wind had always affected me strangely, and I blamed myself now for allowing my imagination to run away with me at the first. I found a novel which I had brought up to my room with me, one of the modern, Chinese-American school, where human nature is analyzed with the patient, industrious indifference of the true Celestial. I took the book to bed with me, and soon under its soothing influences fell asleep. I dreamt a good deal,—nightmares, the definite recollection of which, as is so often the case, vanished from my mind as soon as I awoke, leaving only a vague impression of horror. They had been connected with the wind, of that alone I was conscious, and I went down to breakfast, maliciously hoping that others' rest had been as much disturbed as my own.

To my surprise, however, I found that I had again been the only sufferer. Indeed, so impressed were most of the party with the quiet in which their night had been passed, that they boldly declared my storm to have been the creature of my dreams. There is nothing more annoying when you feel yourself aggrieved by fate than to be told that your troubles have originated in your own fancy; so I dropped the subject. Though the discussion spread for a few minutes round the whole table, Alan took no part in it. Neither did George, except for what I thought a rather unnecessarily rough expression of his disbelief in the cause of my night's disturbance. As we rose from breakfast I saw Alan glance towards his brother, and make a movement, evidently with the purpose of speaking to him. Whether or not George was aware of the look or action, I cannot say; but at the same moment he made rapidly across the room to where one of his principal guests was standing, and at once engaged him in conversation. So earnestly and so volubly was he borne on, that they were still talking together when we ladies appeared again some minutes later, prepared for our walk to church. That was not the only occasion during the day on which I witnessed as I thought the same by-play going on. Again and again Alan appeared to be making efforts to engage George in private conversation, and again and again the latter successfully eluded him.

The church was about a mile away from the house, and as Lucy did not like having the carriages out on a Sunday, one service a week as a rule contented the household. In the afternoon we took the usual Sunday walk. On returning from it, I had just taken off my outdoor things, and was issuing from my bedroom, when I found myself face to face with Alan. He was coming out of George's study, and had succeeded apparently in obtaining that interview for which he had been all day seeking. One glance at his face told me what its nature had been. We paused opposite each

other for a moment, and he looked at me earnestly.

"Are you going to church?" he inquired at last, abruptly.

"No," I answered, with some surprise. "I did not know that any one was going this evening."

"Will you come with me?"

"Yes, certainly; if you don't mind waiting a moment for me to put my things on."

"There's plenty of time," he answered; "meet me in the hall."

A few minutes later we started.

It was a calm, cloudless night, and although the moon was not yet half-full, and already past her meridian, she filled the clear air with gentle light. Not a word broke our silence. Alan walked hurriedly, looking straight before him, his head upright, his lips twitching nervously, while every now and then a half-uttered moan escaped unconsciously from between them. At last I could bear it no longer, and burst forth with the first remark which occurred to me. We were passing a big black, queer-shaped stone standing in rather a lonely uncultivated spot at one end of the garden. It was an old acquaintance of my childhood; but my thoughts had been turned towards it now from the fact that I could see it from my bedroom window, and had been struck afresh by its uncouth, incongruous appearance.

"Isn't there some story connected with that stone?" I asked. "I remember that we always called it the Dead Stone as children."

Alan cast a quick, sidelong glance in that direction, and his brows contracted in an irritable frown. "I don't know," he answered shortly; "they say that there is a woman buried beneath it, I believe."

"A woman buried there!" I exclaimed in surprise; "but who?"

"How should I know? They know nothing whatever about it. The place is full of stupid traditions of that kind." Then, looking suspiciously round at me, "Why do you ask?"

"I don't know; it was just something to say," I answered plaintively. His strange mood so worked upon my nerves, that it was all that I could do to restrain my tears. I think that my tone struck his conscience, for he made a few feverish attempts at conversation after that. But they were so entirely abortive that he soon abandoned the effort, and we finished our walk to church as speechlessly as we had begun it.

The service was bright, and the sermon perhaps a little commonplace, but sensible as it seemed to me in matter, and adequate in style. The peaceful evening hymn which followed, the short solemn pause of silence prayer at the end, soothed and refreshed my spirit. A hasty glance at my companion's face as he stood waiting for me in the porch, with the full light from the church streaming round him, assured me that the same influence had touched him too. Haggard and sad he still looked, it is true; but his features were composed, and the expression of actual pain had left his eyes.

Silent as we had come we started homeward through the waning moonlight, but this silence was of a very different nature to the other, and after a minute or two I did not hesitate to break it.

"It was a good sermon?" I observed interrogatively.

"Yes," he assented, "I suppose you would call it so; but I confess that I should have found the text more impressive without its exposition."

"Poor man!"

"But don't you often find it so?" he asked. "Do you not often wish, to take this evening's instance, that clergymen would infuse themselves with something of St. Paul's own spirit? Then perhaps they would not water all the strength out of his words in their efforts to explain them."

"That is rather a large demand to make upon them, is it not?"

"Is it?" he questioned. "I don't ask them to be inspired saints. I don't expect St. Paul's breadth and depth of thought. But could they not have something of his vigorous completeness, something of the intensity of his feeling and belief? Look at the text of to-night. Did not the preacher's examples and applications take something from its awful unqualified strength?"

"Awful!" I exclaimed, in surprise; "that is hardly the expression I should have used in connection with those words."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. The text is very beautiful, of course, and at times, when people are tiresome and one ought to be nice to them, it is very difficult to act up to. But——"

"But you think that 'awful' is rather a big adjective to use for so small a duty," interposed Alan, and the moonlight showed the flicker of a smile upon his face. Then he continued, gavely, "I doubt whether you yourself realize the full import of the words. The precept of charity is not merely a code of rules by which to order our conduct to our neighbors; it is the picture of a spiritual condition, and such, where it exists in us, must by its very nature be roused into activity by anything that affects us. So with this particular injunction, every circumstance in our lives is a challenge to it, and in presence of all alike it admits of one attitude only: 'Beareth all things, endureth all things.' I hope it will be long before that 'all' sticks in your gizzard, Evie,—before you come face to face with things which nature cannot bear, and yet which must be borne."

He stopped, his voice quivering; and then after a pause went on again more calmly, "And throughout it is the same. Moral precepts everywhere, which will admit of no compromise, no limitation, and yet which are at war with our strongest passions. If one could only interpose some 'unless,' some 'except,' even an 'until,' which should be short of the grave. But we cannot. The law is infinite, universal, eternal; there is no escape, no repose. Resist, strive, endure, that is the recurring cry; that is existence."

"And peace," I exclaimed, appealingly. "Where is there room for peace, if that be true?"

He sighed for answer, and then in a changed and lower tone added, "However thickly the clouds mass, however vainly we search for a coming glimmer in their midst, we never doubt that the sky *is* still beyond—beyond and around us, infinite and infinitely restful."

He raised his eyes as he spoke, and mine followed his. We had entered the wooded glen. Through the scanty autumn foliage we could see the stars shining faintly in the dim moonlight, and beyond them the deep illimitable blue. A dark world it looked, distant and mysterious, and my young spirit rebelled at the consolation offered me.

"Peace seems a long way off," I whispered.

"It is for me," he answered, gently; "not necessarily for you."

"Oh, but I am worse and weaker than you are. If life is to be all warfare, I must be beaten. I cannot always be fighting."

"Cannot you? Evie, what I have been saying is true of every moral law worth having, of every ideal of life worth striving after, that men have yet conceived. But it is only half the truth of Christianity. You know that. We must strive, for the promise is to him that overcometh; but though our aim be even higher than is that of others, we cannot in the end fail to reach it. The victory of the Cross is ours. You know that? You believe that?"

"Yes," I answered, softly, too surprised to say more. In speaking of religion he, as a rule, showed to the full the reserve which is characteristic of his class and country, and this sudden outburst was in itself astonishing; but the eager anxiety with which he emphasized the last words of appeal impressed and bewildered me still further. We walked on for some minutes in silence. Then suddenly Alan stopped, and turning, took my hand in his. In what direction his mind had been working in the interval I could not divine; but the moment he began to speak I felt that he was now for the first time giving utterance to what had been really at the bottom of his thoughts the whole evening. Even in that dim light I could see the anxious look upon his face, and his voice shook with restrained emotion.

"Evie," he said, "have you ever thought of the world in which our spirits dwell, as our bodies do in this one of matter and sense, and of how it may be peopled? I know," he went on hurriedly, "that it is the fashion nowadays to laugh at such ideas. I envy those who have never had cause to be convinced of their reality, and I hope that you may long remain among the number. But should that not be so, should those unseen influences ever touch your life, I want you to remember then, that, as one of the race for whom Christ died, you have as high a citizenship in that spirit land as any creature there: that you are your own soul's warden, and that neither principalities nor powers can rob you of that your birthright."

I think my face must have shown my bewilderment, for he dropped my hand, and walked on with an impatient sigh.

"You don't understand me. Why should you? I daresay that I am talking nonsense—only—only——"

His voice expressed such an agony of doubt and hesitation that I burst out—

"I think that I do understand you a little, Alan. You mean that even from unearthly enemies there is nothing that we need really fear—at least, that is, I suppose, nothing worse than death. But that is surely enough!"

"Why should you fear death?" he said, abruptly; "your soul will live."

"Yes, I know that, but still——" I stopped with a shudder.

"What is life after all but one long death?" he went on, with sudden violence. "Our pleasures, our hopes, our youth are all dying; ambition dies, and even desire at last; our passions and tastes will die, or will live only to mourn their dead opportunity. The happiness of love dies with the loss of the loved, and, worst of all, love itself grows old in our hearts and dies. Why should we shrink only from the one death which can free us from all the others?"

"It is not true, Alan!" I cried, hotly. "What you say is not true. There are many things even here which are living and shall live; and if it were otherwise, in everything, life that ends in death is better than no life at all."

"You say that," he answered, "because for you these things are yet living. To leave life now, therefore, while it is full and sweet, untainted by death, surely that is not a fate to fear. Better, a thousand times better, to see the cord cut with one blow while it is still whole and strong, and to launch out straight

into the great ocean, than to sit watching through the slow years, while strand after strand, thread by thread, loosens and unwinds itself,—each with its own separate pang breaking, bringing the bitterness of death without its release."

His manner, the despairing ring in his voice, alarmed me even more than his words. Clinging to his arm with both hands, while the tears sprang to my eyes—

"Alan," I cried, "don't say such things,—don't talk like that. You are making me miserable."

He stopped short at my words, with bent head, his features hidden in the shadow thus cast upon them,—nothing in his motionless form to show what was passing within him. Then he looked up, and turned his face to the moonlight and to me, laying his hand on one of mine.

"Don't be afraid," he said; "it is all right, my little David. You have driven the evil spirit away." And lifting my hand, he pressed it gently to his lips. Then drawing it within his arms, he went on, as he walked forward, "And even when it was on me at its worst, I was not meditating suicide, as I think you imagine. I am a very average specimen of humanity,—neither brave enough to defy the possibilities of eternity nor cowardly enough to shirk those of time. No, I was only trying idiotically to persuade a girl of eighteen that life was not worth living; and more futilely still, myself, that I did not wish her to live. I am afraid that in my mind philosophy and fact have but small connection with each other; and though my theorizing for your welfare may be true enough, yet,—I cannot help it, Evie,—it would go terribly hard with me if anything were to happen to you."

His voice trembled as he finished. My fear had gone with his return to his natural manner, but my bewilderment remained.

"Why *should* there anything happen to me?" I asked.

"That is just it," he answered, after a pause, looking straight in front of him and drawing his hand wearily over his brow. "I know of no reason why there should." Then giving a sigh, as if finally to dismiss from his mind a worrying subject—"I have acted for the best," he said, "and may God forgive me if I have done wrong."

There was a little silence after that, and then he began to talk again, steadily and quietly. The subject was deep enough still, as deep as any that we had touched upon, but both voice and sentiment were calm, bringing peace to my spirit, and soon making me forget the wonder and fear of a few moments before. Very openly did he talk as we passed on across the long trunk shadows and through the glades of silver light; and I saw farther then into the most sacred recesses of his soul than I have ever done before or since.

When we reached home the moon had already set; but some of her beams seemed to have been left behind within my heart, so pure and peaceful was the light which filled it.

The same feeling continued with me all through that evening. After dinner some of the party played and sang. As it was Sunday, and Lucy was rigid in her views, the music was of a sacred character. I sat in a low armchair in a dark corner of the room, my mind too dreamy to think, and too passive to dream. I hardly interchanged three words with Alan, who remained in a still darker spot, invisible and silent the whole time. Only as we left the room to go to bed, I heard Lucy ask him if he had a headache. I did not hear his answer, and before I could see his face he had turned back again into the drawing-room.

## V.

It was early, and when first I got to my room I felt little inclined for sleep. I wandered to the window, and drawing aside the curtains, looked out upon the still, starlit sky. At least I should rest quiet to-night. The air was very clear, and the sky seemed full of stars. As I stood there scraps of schoolroom learning came back to my mind. That the stars were all suns, surrounded perhaps in their turn by worlds as large or larger than our own. Worlds beyond worlds, and others farther still, which no man might number or even descry. And about the distance of those wonderful suns too,—that one, for instance, at which I was looking,—what was it that I had been told? That our world was not yet peopled, perhaps not yet formed, when the actual spot of light which now struck my sight first started from the star's surface! While it flashed along, itself the very symbol of speed, the whole of mankind had had time to be born, and live, and die!

My gaze dropped, and fell upon the dim, half-seen outline of the Dead Stone. That woman too. While that one ray speeded towards me her life had been lived and ended, and her body had rotted away into the ground. How close together we all were! Her life and mine; our joys, sufferings, deaths—all crowded together into the space of one flash of light! And yet there was nothing there but a horrible skeleton of dead bones, while I——!

I stopped with a shudder, and turned back into the room. I wished that Alan had not told me what lay under the stone; I wished that I had never asked him. It was a ghastly thing to think about, and spoilt all the beauty of the night to me.

I got quickly into bed, and soon dropped asleep. I do not know how long I slept; but when I woke it was with the consciousness again of that haunting wind.

It was worse than ever. The world seemed filled with its din. Hurling itself passionately against the house, it gathered strength with every gust, till it seemed as if the old walls must soon crash in ruins round me. Gust upon gust; blow upon blow; swelling, lessening, never ceasing. The noise surrounded me; it penetrated my inmost being, as all-pervading as silence itself, and wrapping me in a solitude even more complete. There was nothing left in the world but the wind and I, and then a weird intangible doubt as to my own identity seized me. The wind was real, the wind with its echoes of passion and misery from the eternal abyss; but was there anything else? What was, and what had been, the world of sense and of knowledge, my own consciousness, my very self—all seemed gathered up and swept away in that one sole-existent fury of sound.

I pulled myself together, and getting out of bed, groped my way to the table which stood between the bed and the fireplace. The matches were there, and my half-burnt candle, which I lit. The wind penetrating the rattling casement circled round the room, and the flame of my candle bent and flared and shrank before it, throwing strange moving lights and shadows in every corner. I stood there shivering in my thin nightdress, half stunned by the cataract of noise beating on the walls outside, and peered anxiously around me. The room was not the same. Something was changed. What was it? How the shadows leaped and fell, dancing in time to the wind's music. Everything seemed alive. I turned my head slowly to the left, and then to the right, and then round—and stopped with a sudden gasp of fear.

The cabinet was open!

I looked away, and back, and again. There was no room for doubt. The doors were thrown back, and were waving gently in the draught. One of the lower drawers was pulled out, and in a sudden flare of the candle-light I could see something glistening at its bottom. Then the light dwindled again, the candle was almost out, and the cabinet showed a dim black mass in the darkness. Up and down went the flame, and each returning brightness flashed back at me from the thing inside the drawer. I stood fascinated, my eyes fixed upon the spot, waiting for the fitful glitter as it came and went. What was there? I knew that I must go and see, but I did not want to. If only the cabinet would close again before I looked, before I knew what was inside it. But it stood open, and the glittering thing lay there, dragging me towards itself.

Slowly at last, and with infinite reluctance, I went. The drawer was lined with soft white satin, and upon the satin lay a long, slender knife, hilted and sheathed in antique silver, richly set with jewels. I took it up and turned back to the table to examine it. It was Italian in workmanship, and I knew that the carving and chasing of the silver were more precious even than the jewels which studded it, and whose rough setting gave so firm a grasp to my hand. Was the blade as fair as the covering, I wondered? A little resistance at first, and then the long thin steel slid easily out. Sharp, and bright, and finely tempered it looked with its deadly, tapering point. Stains, dull and irregular, crossed the fine engraving on its surface and dimmed its polish. I bent to examine them more closely, and as I did so a sudden stronger gust of wind blew out the candle. I shuddered a little at the darkness and looked up. But it did not matter: the curtain was still drawn away from the window opposite my bedside, and through it a flood of moonlight was pouring in upon floor and bed.

Putting the sheath down upon the table, I walked to the window to examine the knife more closely by that pale light. How gloriously brilliant it was, darkened now and again by the quickly passing shadows of wind-driven clouds! At least so I thought, and I glanced up and out of the window to see them. A black world met my gaze. Neither moon was there nor moonlight. The broad silver beam in which I stood stretched no farther than the window. I caught my breath, my limbs stiffened as I looked. No moon, no cloud, no movement in the clear, calm starlit sky; while still the ghastly light stretched round me, and the spectral shadows drifted across the room.

But it was not all dark outside. One spot caught my eye, bright with a livid unearthly brightness—the Dead Stone shining out into the night like an ember from hell's furnace! There was a horrid semblance of life in the light—a palpitating, breathing glow—and my pulses beat in time to it, till I seemed to be drawing it into my veins. It had no warmth, and as it entered my blood my heart grew colder, and my muscles more rigid. My fingers clutched the dagger-hilt till its jeweled roughness pressed painfully into my palm. All the strength of my strained powers seemed gathered in that grasp, and the more tightly I held the more vividly did the rock gleam and quiver with infernal life. The dead woman! The dead woman! What had I to do with her?

Let her bones rest in the filth of their own decay, out there under the accursed stone.

And now the noise of the wind lessens in my ears. Let it go on—yes, louder and wilder, drowning my senses in its tumult. What is there with me in the room—the great empty room behind me? Nothing; only the cabinet with its waving doors. They are waving to and fro, to and fro—I know it. But there is no other life in the room but that—no, no; no other life in the room but that.

Oh! don't let the wind stop. I can't hear anything while it goes on—but if it stops! Ah! the gusts grow weaker, struggling, forced into rest. Now—now—they have ceased.

Silence!

A fearful pause.

What is that I hear? There, behind me in the room?

Do I hear it? Is there anything?

The throbbing of my own blood in my ears.

No, no! There is something as well—something outside myself.

What is it?

Low; heavy; regular.

God! it is—it is the breath of a living creature! A living creature here—close to me—alone with me!

The numbness of terror conquers me. I can neither stir nor speak. Only my whole soul strains at my ears to listen.

Where does the sound come from?

Close behind me—close.

Ah-h!

It is from there—from the bed where I was lying a moment ago! . . . .

I try to shriek, but the sound gurgles unuttered in my throat. I clutch the stone mullions of the window, and press myself against the panes. If I could but throw myself out—anywhere, anywhere—away from that dreadful sound—from that thing close behind me in the bed! But I can do nothing. The wind has broken forth again now; the storm crashes round me. And still through it all I hear the ghastly breathing—even, low, scarcely audible—but I hear it. I shall hear it as long as I live! . . . .

Is the thing moving?

Is it coming nearer?

No, no; not that—that was but a fancy to freeze me dead.

But to stand here, with that creature behind me, listening, waiting for the warm horror of its breath to touch my neck! Ah! I cannot. I will look. I will see it face to face. Better any agony than this one.

Slowly, with held breath, and eyes aching in their stretched fixity, I turn. There it is! Clear in the moonlight I see the monstrous form within the bed—the dark coverlet rises and falls with its heaving breath. . . . Ah! heaven have mercy! Is there none to help, none to save me from this awful presence? . . . .

And the knife-hilt draws my fingers round it, while my flesh quivers, and my soul grows sick with loathing. The wind howls, the shadows chase through the room, hunting with fearful darkness more fearful light; and I stand looking. . . . listening. . . .

. . . . . .

I must not stand here forever; I must be up and doing. What a noise the wind makes, and the rattling of the windows and the doors. If he sleeps through this he will sleep through all. Noiselessly my bare feet tread the carpet as I approach the bed; noiselessly my left arm raises the heavy curtain. What does it hide? Do I not know? The bestial features, half-hidden in coarse, black growth; the muddy, blotched skin, oozing foulness at every pore. Oh, I know them too well! What a monster it is! How the rank breath gurgles through his throat in his drunken sleep. The eyes are closed now, but I know them too; their odious leer, and the venomous hatred with which they can glare at me from their bloodshot setting. But the time has come at last. Never again shall their passion insult me, or their fury degrade me in slavish terror. There he lies; there at my mercy, the man who for fifteen years has made God's light a shame to me, and His darkness a terror. The end has come at last—the only end possible, the only end left me. On his head be the blood and the crime! God almighty, I am not guilty! The end has come; I can bear my burden no farther.

"Beareth all things, endureth all things."

Where have I heard those words? They are in the Bible; the precept of charity. What has that to do with me? Nothing. I heard the words in my dreams somewhere. A white-faced man said them, a white-faced man with pure eyes. To me—no, no, not to me; to a girl it was—an ignorant, innocent girl, and she accepted them as an eternal, unqualified law. Let her bear but half that I have borne, let her endure but one-tenth of what I have endured, and then if she dare let her speak in judgment against me.

Softly now; I must draw the heavy coverings away, and bare his breast to the stroke—the stroke that shall free me. I know well where to plant it; I have learned that from the old lady's Italian. Did he guess why I questioned him so closely of the surest, straightest road to a man's heart? No matter, he cannot hinder me now. Gently! Ah! I have disturbed him. He moves, mutters in his sleep, throws out his arm. Down; down; crouching behind the curtain. Heavens! if he wakes and see me, he will kill me! No, alas, if only he would. I would kiss the hand that he struck me with; but he is too cruel for that. He will imagine some new and more hellish torture to punish me with. But the knife! I have got that; he shall never touch me living again. . . . He is quieter now. I hear his breath, hoarse and heavy as a wild beast's panting. He draws it more evenly, more deeply. The danger is past. Thank God!

God! What have I to do with Him? A God of Judgment. Ha, ha! Hell cannot frighten me; it will not be worse than earth. Only he will be there too. Not with him, not with him—send me to the lowest circle of torment, but not with him. There, his breast is bare now. Is the knife sharp? Yes; and the blade is strong enough. Now let me strike—myself afterwards if need be, but him first. Is it the devil that prompts me? Then the devil is my friend, and the friend of the world. No, God is a God of love. He cannot wish such a man to live. He made him, but the devil spoilt him; and let the devil have his handiwork back again. It has served him long enough here; and its last service shall be to make me a murderess.

How the moonlight gleams from the blade as my arm swings up and back: with how close a grasp the rough hilt draws my fingers round it. Now.

A murderess?

Wait a moment. A moment may make me free; a moment may make me—that!

Wait. Hand and dagger droop again. His life has dragged its slime over my soul; shall his death poison it with a fouler corruption still?

"My own soul's warden."

What was that? Dream memories again.

"Resist, strive, endure."

Easy words. What do they mean for me? To creep back now to bed by his side, and to begin living again tomorrow the life which I have lived today? No, no; I cannot do it. Heaven cannot ask it of me. And there is no other way. That or this; this or that. Which shall it be? Ah! I have striven, God knows. I have endured so long that I hoped even to do so to the end. But today! Oh! the torment and the outrage: body and soul still bear the stain of it. I thought that my heart and my pride were dead together, but he has stung them again into aching, shameful life. Yesterday I might have spared him, to save my own cold soul from sin; but now it is cold no longer. It burns, it burns and the fire must be slaked.

Ay, I will kill him, and have done with it. Why should I pause any longer? The knife drags my hand back for the stroke. Only the dream surrounds me; the pure man's face is there, white, beseeching, and God's voice rings in my heart—

"To him that overcometh."

But I cannot overcome. Evil has governed my life, and evil is stronger than I am. What shall I do? What shall I do? God, if Thou art stronger than evil, fight for me.

"The victory of the Cross is ours."

Yes, I know it. It is true, it is true. But the knife? I cannot loose the knife if I would. How to wrench it from my own hold? Thou God of Victory be with me! Christ help me!

I seize the blade with my left hand; the two-edged steel slides through my grasp; a sharp pain in my fingers and palm; and then—nothing. . . .

. . . . . .

### VI.

When I again became conscious, I found myself half kneeling, half lying across the bed, my arms stretched out in front of me, my face buried in the clothes. Body and mind were alike numbed. A smarting pain in my left hand, a dreadful terror in my heart, were at first the only sensations of which I was aware. Slowly, very slowly, sense and memory returned to me, and with them a more vivid intensity of mental anguish, as detail by detail I recalled the weird horror of the night. Had it really happened—was the thing still there—or was it all a ghastly nightmare? It was some minutes before I dared either to move or look up, and then fearfully I raised my head. Before me stretched the smooth white coverlet, faintly bright with yellow sunshine. Weak and giddy, I struggled to my feet, and, steadying myself against the foot of the bed, with clenched teeth and bursting heart, forced my gaze round to the other end. The pillow lay there, bare and unmarked save for what might well have been the pressure of my own head. My breath came more freely, and I turned to the window. The sun had just risen, the golden tree-tops were touched with light, faint threads of mist hung and there across the sky, and the twittering of birds sounded clearly through the crisp autumn air.

It was nothing but a bad dream then, after all, this horror which still hung round me, leaving me incapable of effort, almost of thought I remembered the cabinet, and looked swiftly in that direction. There it stood, closed as usual, closed as it had been the evening before, as it had been for the last three hundred years, except in my dreams.

Yes, that was it; nothing but a dream—a gruesome, haunting dream. With an instinct of wiping out the dreadful memory, I raised

my hand wearily to my forehead. As I did so, I became conscious again of how it hurt me. I looked at it. It was covered with half-dried blood, and two straight clean cuts appeared, one across the palm and one across the inside of the fingers just below the knuckles. I looked again towards the bed, and, in the place where my hand had rested during my faint, a small patch of red blood was to be seen.

Then it was true! Then it had all happened! With a low shuddering sob I threw myself down upon the couch at the foot of the bed, and lay there for some minutes, my limbs trembling, and my soul shrinking within me. A mist of evil, fearful and loathsome, had descended upon my girlhood's life, sullying its ignorant innocence, saddening its brightness, as I felt, forever. I lay there till my teeth began to chatter, and I realized that I was bitterly cold. To return to that accursed bed was impossible, so I pulled a rug which hung at one end of the sofa over me, and, utterly worn out in mind and body, fell uneasily asleep.

I was roused by the entrance of my maid. I stopped her exclamations and questions by shortly stating that I had had a bad night, had been unable to rest in bed, and had had an accident with my hand—without further specifying of what description.

"I didn't know that you had been feeling unwell when you went to bed last night, miss," she said.

"When I went to bed last night? Unwell? What do you mean?"

"Only Mr. Alan has just asked me to let him know how you find yourself this morning," she answered.

Then he expected something, dreaded something. Ah! why had he yielded and allowed me to sleep here, I asked myself bitterly, as the incidents of the day before flashed through my mind.

"Tell him," I said, "what I have told you; and say that I wish to speak to him directly after breakfast." I could not confide my story to any one else, but speak of it I must to some one or go mad.

Every moment passed in that place was an added misery. Much to my maid's surprise I said that I would dress in her room—the little one which, as I have said, was close to my own. I felt better there; but my utter fatigue and my wounded hand combined to make my toilet slow, and I found that most of the party had finished breakfast when I reached the dining room. I was glad of this, for even as it was I found it difficult enough to give coherent answers to the questions which my white face and bandaged hand called forth. Alan helped me by giving a resolute turn to the conversation. Once only our eyes met across the table. He looked as haggard and worn as I did. I learned afterwards that he had passed most of that fearful night pacing the passage outside my door, though he listened in vain for any indication of what was going on within the room.

The moment I had finished breakfast he was by my side. "You wish to speak to me now?" he asked in a low tone.

"Yes; now," I answered, breathlessly, and without raising my eyes from the ground.

"Where shall we go? Outside? It is a bright day, and we shall be freer there from interruption."

I assented and then looking up at him appealingly, "Will you fetch my things for me? I cannot go up to that room again."

He seemed to understand me, nodded, and was gone. A few minutes later we left the house, and made our way in silence towards a grassy spot on the side of the ravine where we had already indulged in more than one friendly talk.

As we went, the Dead Stone came for a moment into view. I seized Alan's arm in an almost convulsive grip. "Tell me," I whispered—"you refused to tell me yesterday, but you must know—who is buried beneath that rock?"

There was now neither timidity nor embarrassment in my tone. The horrors of that house had become part of my life forever, and their secrets were mine by right. Alan, after a moment's pause, a questioning glance at my face, tacitly accepted the position.

"I told you the truth," he replied, "when I said that I did not know; but I can tell you the popular tradition on the subject, if you like. They say that Margaret Mervyn, the woman who murdered her husband, is buried there, and that Dame Alice had the rock placed over her grave—whether to save it from insult or to mark it out for opprobrium, I never heard. The poor people about here do not care to go near the place after dark, and among the older ones there are still some, I believe, who spit at the suicide's grave as they pass."

"Poor woman, poor woman!" I exclaimed, in a burst of uncontrollable compassion.

"Why should you pity her?" demanded he with sudden sternness; "she was a suicide and a murderess too. It would be better for the public conscience, I believe, if such were still hung in chains, or buried at the cross-roads with a stake through ther bodies."

"Hush, Alan, hush!" I cried hysterically, as I clung to him; "don't speak harshly of her. You do not know, you cannot tell, how terribly she was tempted. How can you?"

He looked down at me in bewildered surprise. "How can I?" he repeated. "You speak as if you could. What do you mean?"

"Don't ask me," I answered, turning towards him my face—white, quivering, tear-stained. "Don't ask me. Not now. You must answer my questions first, and after that I will tell you. But I cannot talk of it now. Not yet."

We had reached the place we were in search of as I spoke. There, where the spreading roots of a great beech tree formed a natural resting place upon the steep side of the ravine, I took my seat, and Alan stretched himself upon the grass beside me. Then looking up at me—"I do not know what questions you would ask," he said quietly; "but I will answer them, whatever they may be."

But I did not ask them yet. I sat instead with my hands clasping my knee, looking opposite at the glory of harmonious color, or down the glen at the vista of far-off, dream-like loveliness, on which it opened out. The yellow autumn sunshine made everything golden, the fresh autumn breezes filled the air with life; but to me a loathsome shadow seemed to rest upon all, and to stretch itself out far beyond where my eyes could reach, befouling the beauty of the whole wide world. At last I spoke. "You have known of it all, I suppose; of this curse that is in the world—sin and suffering, and what such words mean."

"Yes," he said, looking at me with wondering pity, "I am afraid so."

"But have you known them as they are known to some—agonized, hopeless suffering, and sin that is all but inevitable? Some time in your life probably you have realized that such things are: it has come home to you, and to every one else, no doubt, except a few ignorant girls such as I was yesterday. But there are some—yes, thousands and thousands—who even now, at this moment, are feeling sorrow like that, are sinking deep, deeper into the bottomless pit of their soul's degradaton. And yet men who know this, who have seen it, laugh, talk, are happy, amuse themselves—how can they, how can they?" I stopped with a catch in my voice, and then stretching out my arms in front of me—"And it is not only men. Look how beautiful the earth is, and God has made it, and lets the sun crown it every day with a new glory, while this horror of evil broods over and poisons it all. Oh, why is it so? I cannot understand it."

My arms drooped again as I finished, and my eyes sought Alan's. His were full of tears, but there was almost a smile quivering at the corners of his lips as he replied: "When you have found an answer to that question, Evie, come and tell me and mankind at large. It will be news to us all." Then he continued—"But, after all, the earth is beautiful, and the sun does shine. We have our own happiness to rejoice in, our own sorrows to bear, the suffering that is near to us to grapple with. For the rest, for this blackness of evil which surrounds us, and which we can do nothing to lighten, it will soon, thank God, become vague and far off to you as it is to others. Your feeling of it will be dulled, and, except at moments, you too will forget."

"But that is horrible," I exclaimed, passionately; "the evil will be there all the same, whether I feel it or not. Men and women will be struggling in their misery and sin, only I shall be too selfish to care."

"We cannot go outside the limits of our own nature," he replied; "our knowledge is shallow and our spiritual insight dark, and God in His mercy has made our hearts shallow too, and our imagination dull. If, knowing and trusting only as men do, we were to feel as angels feel, earth would be hell indeed."

It was cold comfort, but at that moment anything warmer or brighter would have been unreal and utterly repellent to me. I hardly took in the meaning of his words, but it was as if a hand had been stretched out to me, struggling in the deep mire, by one who himself felt solid ground beneath him. Where he stood I also might some day stand, and that thought seemed to make patience possible.

It was he who first broke the silence which followed. "You were saying that you had questions to ask me. I am impatient to put mine in return, so please go on."

It had been a relief to me to turn even to generalizations of despair from the actual horror which had inspired them, and to which my mind was thus recalled. With an effort I replied, "Yes, I want to ask you about that room—the room in which I slept, and—and the murder which was committed there." In spite of all that I could do, my voice sank almost to a whisper as I concluded, and I was trembling from head to foot.

"Who told you that a murder was committed there?" Something in my face as he asked the question made him add quickly, "Never mind. You are right. That is the room in which Hugh Mervyn was murdered by his wife. I was surprised at your question, for I did not know that anyone but my brothers and myself were aware of the fact. The subject is never mentioned. It is closely connected with one intensely painful to our family, and besides, if spoken of, there would be inconveniences arising from the superstitious terrors of servants, and the natural dislike of guests to sleep in a room where such a thing had happened. Indeed it was largely with the view of

wiping out the last memory of the crime's locality, that my father renewed the interior of the room some twenty years ago. The only tradition which has been adhered to in connection with it is the one which has now been violated in your person—the one which precludes any unmarried woman from sleeping there. Except for that, the room has, as you know, lost all sinister reputation, and its title of 'haunted' has become purely conventional. Nevertheless, as I said, you are right—that is undoubtedly the room in which the murder was committed."

He stopped and looked up at me, waiting for more.

"Go on; tell me about it, and what followed." My lips formed the words; my heart beat faintly for my breath to utter them.

"About the murder itself there is not much to tell. The man, I believe, was an inhuman scoundrel, and the woman first killed him in desperation, and afterwards herself in despair. The only detail connected with the actual crime of which I have ever heard, was the gale that was blowing that night—the fiercest known to this countryside in that generation; and it has always been said since that any misfortune to the Mervyns—especially any misfortune connected with the curse—comes with a storm of wind. That was why I so disliked your story of the imaginary tempests which have disturbed your nights since you slept there. As to what followed,"—he gave a sigh—"that story is long enough and full of incident. On the morning after the murder, so runs the tale, Dame Alice came down to the Grange from the tower to which she had retired when her son's wickedness had driven her from his house, and there in the presence of the two corpses she foretold the curse which should rest upon their descendants for generations to come. A clergyman who was present, horrified, it is said at her words, adjured her by the mercy of Heaven to place some term to the doom which she had pronounced. She replied that no mortal might reckon the fruit of a plant which drew its life from hell; that a term there should be, but as it passed the wisdom of man to fix it, so it should pass the wit of man to discover it. She then placed in the room this cabinet, constructed by herself and her Italian follower, and said that the curse should not depart from the family until the day when its doors were unlocked and its legend read.

"Such is the story. I tell it to you as it was told to me. One thing only is certain, that the doom thus traditionally foretold has been only too amply fulfilled."

"And what was the doom?"

Alan hesitated a little, and when he spoke his voice was almost awful in its passionless sternness, in its despairing finality; it seemed to echo the irrevocable judgment which his words pronounced: "That the crimes against God and each other which had destroyed the parents' life should enter into the children's blood, and that never thereafter should there fail a Mervyn to bring shame or death upon one generation of his father's house.

"There were two sons of that ill-fated marriage," he went on after a pause, "boys at the time of their parents' death. When they grew up they both fell in love with the same woman, and one killed the other in a duel. The story of the next generation was a peculiarly sad one. Two brother took opposite sides during the civil troubles; but so fearful were they of the curse which lay upon the family, that they chiefly made use of their mutual position in order to protect and guard each other. After the wars were over, the younger brother, while traveling upon some parliamentary commission, stopped a night at the Grange. There, through a mistake, he exchanged the report which he was bringing to London for a packet of papers implicating his brother and several besides in a royalist plot. He only discovered his error as he handed the papers to his superior, and was but just able to warn his brother in time for him to save his life by flight. The other men involved were taken and executed, and as it was known by what means information had reached the Government, the elder Mervyn was universally charged with the vilest treachery. It is said that when after the Restoration his return home was rumored the neighboring gentry assembled, armed with riding whips, to flog him out of the country if he should dare to show his face there. He died abroad, shame-stricken and broken-hearted. It was his son, brought up by his uncle in the sternest tenets of Puritanism, who, coming home after a lengthened journey, found that during his absence his sister had been shamefully seduced. He turned her out of doors, then and there, in the midst of a bitter January night, and the next morning her dead body and that of her new-born infant were found half buried in the fresh-fallen snow on the top of the wolds. The 'white lady' is still supposed by the villagers to haunt that side of the glen. And so it went on. A beautiful, heartless Mervyn in Queen Anne's tme enticed away the affections of her sister's betrothed, and on the day of her own wedding with him, her forsaken sister was found drowned by her own act in the pond at the bottom of the garden. Two brothers were soldiers together in some Continental war, and one was involuntarily the means of discovering and exposing the treason of the other. A girl was betrayed into a false marriage, and her life ruined by a man who came into the house as her brother's friend, and whose infamous designs were forwarded and finally accomplished by that same brother's active though unsuspecting assistance. Generation after generation, men or women, guilty or innocent, through the action of their own will or in spite of it, the curse has never yet failed of its victims."

"Never yet? But surely in our own time—your father?" I did not dare to put the question which was burning my lips.

"Have you never heard of the tragic end of my poor young uncles?" he replied. "They were several years older than my father. When boys of fourteen and fifteen they were sent out with the keeper for their first shooting lesson, and the elder shot his brother through the heart. He himself was delicate, and they say that he never entirely recovered from the shock. He died before he was twenty, and my father, then a child of seven years old, became the heir. It was partly, no doubt, owing to this calamity having thus occurred before he was old enough to feel it, that his comparative skepticism on the whole subject was due. To that, I suppose, and to the fact that he grew up in an age of railways and liberal culture."

"He didn't believe, then, in the curse?"

"Well, rather, he thought nothing about it. Until, that is, the time came when it took effect, to break his heart and end his life."

"How do you mean?"

There was silence for a little. Alan had turned away his head, so that I could not see his face. Then—

"I suppose you have never been told the true story of why Jack left the country?"

"No. Was he—is he——?"

"He is one victim of the curse in this generation, and I, God help me, am the other, and perhaps more wretched one."

His voice trembled and broke, and for the first time that day I almost forgot the mysterious horror of the night before, in my pity for the actual, tangible suffering before me. I stretched out my hand to his, and his fingers closed on mine with a sudden, painful grip. Then quietly—

"I will tell you the story," he said, "though since that miserable time I have spoken of it to no one."

There was a pause before he began. He lay there by my side, his gaze turned across me up the sunbright, autumn-tinted glen, but his eyes shadowed by the memories which he was striving to recall and arrange in due order in his mind. And when he did speak it was not directly to begin the promised recital.

"You never knew Jack," he said, abruptly.

"Hardly," I acquiesced. "I remember thinking him very handsome."

"There could not be two opinions as to that," he answered. "And a man who could have done anything he liked with life, had things gone differently. His abilities were fine, but his strength lay above all in his character: he was strong—strong in his likes and in his dislikes, resolute, fearless, incapable of half measures—a man, every inch of him. He was not generally popular—stiff, hard, unsympathetic, people called him. From one point of view, and one only, he perhaps deserved the epithets. If a woman lost his respect she seemed to lose his pity too. Like a mediaeval monk, he looked upon such rather as the cause than the result of male depravity, and his contempt for them mingled with anger, almost, as I sometimes thought, with hatred. And this attitude was, I have no doubt, resented by the men of his own class and set, who shared neither his faults nor his virtues. But in other ways he was not hard. He could love; I, at least, have cause to know it. If you would hear his story rightly from my lips, Evie, you must try and see him with my eyes. The friend who loved me, and whom I loved with the passion which, if not the strongest, is certainly, I believe, the most enduring of which men are capable—that perfect brother's love, which so grows into our being that when it is at peace we are scarcely conscious of its existence, and when it is wounded our very life-blood seems to flow at the stroke. Brothers do not always love like that: I can only wish that we had not done so.

### *VII.*

"Well, about five years ago, before I had taken my degree, I became acquainted with a woman whom I will call 'Delia,'—it is near enough to the name by which she went. She was a few years older than myself, very beautiful, and I believed her to be what she described herself—the innocent victim of circumstance and false appearance, a helpless prey to the vile calumnies of worldlings. In sober fact, I am afraid that whatever her life may have been actually at the time that I knew her—a subject which I have never cared to investigate—her past had been not only bad enough irretrievably to fix her position in society, but bad enough to leave her without an ideal in the world, though still retaining within her heart the possibilities of a passion which, from the moment that it came to life, was strong enough to turn her whole existence into one desperate reckless straining after an object hopelessly beyond her reach. That was the woman with whom, at the age of twenty,

I fancied myself in love. She wanted to get a husband, and she thought me—rightly—ass enough to accept the post. I was very young then even for my years,—a student, an idealist, with an imagination highly developed, and no knowledge whatever of the world as it actually is. Anyhow, before I had known her a month, I had determined to make her my wife. My parents were aboard at the time, George and Lucy here, so that it was to Jack that I imparted the news of my resolve. As you may imagine, he did all that he could to shake it. But I was immovable. I disbelieved his facts, and despised his contempt from the standpoint of my own superior morality. This state of things continued for several weeks, during the greater part of which time I was at Oxford. I only knew that while I was there, Jack had made Delia's acquaintance, and was apparently cultivating it assiduously.

"One day, during the Easter vacation, I got a note from her asking me to supper at her house. Jack was invited too. We lodged together while my people were away.

"There is no need to dwell upon that supper. There were two or three women there of her own sort, or worse, and a dozen men from among the most profligate in London. The conversation was, I should think, bad even for that class; and she, the goddess of my idolatry, outstripped them all by the foul, coarse shamelessness of her language and behavior. Before the entertainment was half over, I rose and took my leave, accompanied by Jack and another man—Legard was his name—who I presume was bored. Just as we had passed through into the anteroom, which lay beyond the one in which we had been eating, Delia followed us, and laying her hand on Jack's arm, said that she must speak with him. Legard and I went into the outer hall, and we had not been there more than a minute when the door from the anteroom opened, and we heard Delia's voice. I remember the words well—that was not the only occasion on which I was to hear them. 'I will keep the ring as a record of my love,' she said, 'and understand, that though you may forget, I never shall.' Jack came through, the door closed, and as we went out I glanced towards his left hand, and saw, as I expected to see, the absence of the ring which he usually wore there. It contained a gem which my mother had picked up in the East, and I knew that he valued it quite peculiarly. We always called it Jack's talisman.

"A miserable time followed, a time for me of agonizing wonder and doubt, during which regret for my dead illusion was entirely swallowed up in the terrible dread of my brother's degradation. Then came the announcement of his engagement to Lady Sylvia Grey; and a week later, the very day after I had finally returned to London from Oxford, I received a summons from Delia to come and see her. Curiosity, and the haunting fear about Jack, which still hung round me, induced me to consent to what otherwise would have been intolerably repellent to me, and I went. I found her in a mad passion of fury. Jack had refused to hee her or to answer her letters, and she had sent for me, that I might give him her message—tell him that he belonged to her and her only and that he never should marry another woman. Angry at my interference, Jack disdained even to repudiate her claims, only sending back a threat of appealing to the police if she ventured upon any further annoyance. I wrote as she told me, and she emphasized my silence on the subject by writing back to me a more definite and explicit assertion of her rights. Beyond that for some weeks she made no sign. I have no doubt that she had means of keeping watch upon both his movements and mine; and during that time, as she relinquished gradually all hopes of inducing him to abandon his purpose, she was being driven to her last despairing resolve.

"Later, when all was over, Jack told me the story of that spring and summer. He told me how, when he found me immovable on the subject, he had resolved to stop the marriage somehow through Delia herself. He had made her acquaintance, and sought her society frequently. She had taken a fancy to him, and he admitted that he had availed himself of this fact to increase his intimacy with her, and, as he hoped ultimately, his power over her. but he was not conscious of ever having varied in his manner towards her of contemptuous indifference. This contradictory behavior—his being constantly near her, yet always beyond her reach—was probably the very thing which excited her fancy into passion, and the one strong passion of the poor woman's life. Then came his deliberate demand that she should by her own act unmask herself in my sight. The unfortunate woman tried to bargain for some proof of affection in return, and on this occasion had first openly declared her feelings towards him. He did not believe her; he refused her terms; but when as her payment she asked for the ring which was so especially associated with himself, he agreed to give it to her. Otherwise hoping, no doubt against hope, dreading above all things a quarrel and final separation, she submitted unconditionally. And from the time of that evening, when Legard and I had overheard her parting words, Jack never saw her again until the last and final catastrophe.

"It was in July. My parents had returned to England, but had come straight on here. Jack and I were dining together with Lady Sylvia at her father's house—her brother, young Grey, making the fourth at dinner. I had arranged to go to a party with your mother, and I told the servants that a lady would call for me early in the evening. The house stood in Park Lane, and after dinner we all went out on to the broad balcony which opened from the drawing-room. There was a strong wind blowing that night, and I remember well the vague, disquieted feeling of unreality that possessed me—sweeping through me, as it were, with each gust of wind. Then, suddenly, a servant stood behind me, saying that the lady had come for me, and was in the drawing-room. Shocked that my aunt should have troubled herself to come so far, I turned quickly, stepped back into the room, and found myself face to face with Delia. She was fully dressed for the evening, with a long silk opera-cloak over her shoulders, her face as white as her gown, her splendid eyes strangely wide open and shining. I don't know what I said or did. I tried to get her away, but it was too late. The others had heard us, and appeared at the open window. Jack came forward at once, speaking rapidly, fiercely; telling her to leave the house at once; promising desperately that he would see her in his own rooms on the morrow. Well I remember how her answer rang out—

"'Neither tomorrow nor another day. I will never leave you again while I live.'

"At the same instant she drew something swiftly from under her cloak, there was the sound of a pistol shot and she lay dead at our feet, her blood splashing upon Jack's shirt and hands as she fell."

Alan paused in his recital. He was trembling from head to foot; but he kept his eyes turned steadily downwards, and both face and voice were cold—almost expressionless.

"Of course there was an inquest," he resumed, "which, as usual, exercised its very ill-defined powers in inquiring into all possible motives for the suicide. Young Grey, who had stepped into the room just before the shot had been fired, swore to the last words Delia had uttered; Legard to those he had overheard the night of that dreadful supper. There were scores of men to bear witness to the intimate relations which had existed between her and Jack during the whole of the previous spring. I had to give evidence. A skillful lawyer had been retained by one of her sisters, and had been instructed by her on points which no doubt she had originally learnt from Delia herself. In his hands, I had not only to corroborate Grey and Legard, and to give full details of that last interview, but also to swear to the peculiar value which Jack attached to the talisman ring which he had given Delia; to the language she had held when I saw her after my return from Oxford; to her subsequent letter, and Jack's fatal silence on the occasion. The story by which Jack and I strove to account for the facts was laughed at as a clumsy invention, and my undisguised reluctance in giving evidence added greatly to its weight against my brother's character.

"The jury returned a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind, the result of desertion by her lover. You may imagine how that verdict was commented upon by every Radical newspaper in the kingdom, and for once society more than corroborated the opinions of the press. The larger public regarded the story as an extreme case of the innocent victim and the cowardly society villain. It was only among a comparatively small set that Delia's reputation was known, and there, in view of Jack's notorious and peculiar intimacy, his repudiation of all relations with her was received with contemptuous incredulity. That he should have first entered upon such relations at the very time when he was already courting Lady Sylvia was regarded even in those circles as a 'strong order,' and they looked upon his present attitude with great indignation, as a cowardly attempt to save his own character by casting upon the dead woman's memory all the odium of a false accusation. With an entire absence of logic, too, he was made responsible for the suicide having taken place in Lady Sylvia's presence. She had broken off the engagement the day after the catastrophe, and her family, a clan powerful in the London world, furious at the mud through which her name had been dragged, did all that they could to intensify the feeling already existing against Jack.

"Not a voice was raised in his defense. He was advised to leave the army; he was requested to withdraw from some of his clubs, turned out of others, avoided by his fast acquaintances, cut by his respectable ones. It was enough to kill a weaker man.

"He showed no resentment at the measure thus dealt out to him. Indeed, at the first, except for Sylvia's desertion of him, he seemed dully indifferent to it all. It was as if his soul had been stunned, from the moment that that wretched woman's blood had splashed upon his fingers, and her dead eyes had looked into his own.

"But it was not long before he realized the full extent of the social damnation which had been inflicted upon him, and he then resolved to leave the country and go to America. The

night before he started he came down here to take leave. I was here looking after my parents —George, whose mind was almost unhinged by the family disgrace, having gone abroad with his wife. My mother at the first news of what had happened had taken to her bed, never to leave it again; and thus it was in my presence alone, up there in my father's little study, that Jack gave him that night the whole story. He told it quietly enough; but when he had finished, with a sudden outburst of feeling he turned upon me. It was I who had been the cause of it all. My insensate folly had induced him to make the unhappy woman's acquaintance, to allow and even encourage her fatal love, to commit all the blunders and sins which had brought about her miserable ending and his final overthrow. It was by means of me that she had obtained access to him on that dreadful night; my evidence which most utterly damned him in public opinion; through me he had lost his reputation, his friends, his career, his country, the woman he loved, his hopes for the future; through me, above all, that the burden of that horrible death would lie forever on his soul. He was lashing himself to fury with his own words as he spoke; and I stood leaning against the wall opposite to him cold, dumb, unresisting, when suddenly my father interrupted. I think that both Jack and I had forgotten his presence; but at the sound of his voice, changed from what we had ever heard it, we turned to him, and I then for the first time saw in his face the death-look which never afterwards quitted it.

"'Stop, Jack,' he said; 'Alan is not to blame; and if it had not been in this way, it would have been in some other. I only am guilty, who brought you both into existence with my own hell-stained blood in your veins. If you wish to curse anyone, curse your family, your name, me if you will, and may God forgive me that you were ever born into the world!'"

Alan stopped with a shudder, and then continued, dully, "It was when I heard those words, the most terrible that a father could have uttered, than I first understood all that that old sixteenth-century tale might mean to me and mine—I have realized it vividly enough since. Early the next morning, when the dawn was just breaking, Jack came to the door of my room to bid me good-by. All his passion was gone. His looks and tones seemed part and parcel of the dim gray morning light. He freely withdrew all the charges he had made against me the night before; forgave me all the share that I had had in his misfortunes; and then begged that I would never come near him, or let him hear from me again. The curse is heavy upon us both,' he said, 'and it is the only favor which you can do me.' I have never seen him since."

"But you have heard of him!" I exclaimed; "what has become of him?"

Alan raised himself to a sitting posture. "The last that I heard," he said, with a catch in his voice, "was that in his misery and hopelessness he was taking to drink. George writes to him, and does what he can; but I—I dare not say a word, for fear it should turn to poison on my lips—I dare not lift a hand to help him, for fear it should have power to strike him to the ground. The worst may be yet to come; I am still living, still living. There are depths of shame to which he has not sunk. And oh, Evie, Evie, he is my own, my best-loved brother!"

All his composure was gone now. His voice rose to a kind of wail with the last words, and folding his arms on his raised knee, he let his head fall upon them, while his figure quivered with scarcely restrained emotion. There was a silence for some moments while he sat thus, I looking on in wretched helplessness beside him. Then he raised his head, and, without looking round at me, went on in a low tone: "And what is in the future? I pray that death instead of shame may be the portion of the next generation, and I look at George's boys only to wonder which of them is the happy one who shall some day lie dead at his brother's feet. Are you surprised at my resolution never to marry? The fatal prophecy is rich in its fulfillment; none of our name and blood are safe; and the day might come when I too should have to call upon my children to curse me for their birth,—should have to watch while the burden which I could no longer bear alone pressed the life from their mother's heart."

Through the tragedy of this speech I was conscious of a faint suggestion of comfort, a far-off glimmer, as of unseen home-lights on a midnight sky. I was in no mood then to understand, or to seek to understand, what it was; but I know now that his words had removed the weight of helpless banishment from my spirit—that his heart, speaking through them to my own, had made me for life the sharer of his grief.

### *VIII.*

Presently he drew his shoulders together with a slight determined jerk, threw himself back upon the grass, and turning to me, with that tremulous, haggard smile upon his lips which I knew so well, but which had never before struck me with such infinite pathos, "Luckily," he said, "there are other things to do in life besides being happy. Only perhaps you understand now what I meant last night when I spoke of things which flesh and blood cannot bear, and yet which must be borne."

Suddenly and sharply his words roused again into activity the loathsome memory which my interest in his story had partially deadened. He noticed the quick involuntary contraction of my muscles, and read it aright. "That reminds me," he went on; "I must claim your promise. I have told you my story. Now, tell me yours."

I told him; not as I have set it down here, though perhaps even in greater detail, but incoherently, bit by bit, while he helped me out with gentle questions, quickly comprehending gestures, and patient waiting during the pauses of exhaustion which perforce interposed themselves. As my story approached its climax, his agitation grew almost equal to my own, and he listened to the close, his teeth clenched, his brows bent, as if passing again with me through that awful conflict. When I had finished, it was some moments before either of us could speak; and then he burst forth into bitter self-reproach for having so far yielded to his brother's angry obstinacy as to allow me to sleep the third night in that fatal room.

"It was cowardice," he said, "sheer cowardice! After all that has happened, I dared not have a quarrel with one of my own blood. And yet if I had not hardened my heart, I had reason to know what I was risking."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Those other two girls who slept there," he said, breathlessly; "it was in each case after the third night there that they were found dead—dead, Evie, so runs the story, with a mark upon their necks similar in shape and position to the death-wound which Margaret Mervyn inflicted upon herself."

I could not speak, but I clutched his hand with an almost convulsive grip.

"And I knew the story,—I knew it!" he cried. "As boys we were not allowed to hear much of our family traditions, but this one I knew. When my father redid the interior of the east room, he removed at the same time a board from above the doorway outside, on which had been written—it is said by Dame Alice herself—a warning upon this very subject. I happened to be present when our old housekeeper, who had been his nurse, remonstrated with him warmly upon this act; and I asked her afterwards what the board was, and why she cared about it so much. In her excitement she told me the story of those unhappy girls, repeating again and again that, if the warning were taken away, evil would come of it."

"And she was right," I said, dully. "Oh, if only your father had left it there!"

"I suppose," he answered, speaking more quietly, "that he was impatient of traditions which, as I told you, he at that time more than half despised. Indeed he altered the shape of the doorway, raising it, and making it flat and square, so that the old inscription could not have been replaced, even had it been wished. I remember it was fitted round the low Tudor arch which was previously there."

My mind, too worn with many emotions for deliberate thought, wandered on languidly, and as it were mechanically, upon these last trivial words. The doorway presented itself to my view as it had originally stood, with the discarded warning above it; and then, by a spontaneous comparison of mental vision, I recalled the painted board which I had noticed three days before in Dame Alice's tower. I suggested to Alan that it might have been the identical one— its shape was as he described. "Very likely," he answered, absently. "Do you remember what the words were?"

"Yes, I think so," I replied. "Let me see." And I repeated them slowly, dragging them out as it were one by one from my memory:

"Where the woman sinned the maid shall win;
But God help the maid that sleeps within."

"You see," I said, turning towards him slowly, "the last line is a warning such as you spoke of."

But to my surprise Alan had sprung to his feet, and was looking down at me, his whole body quivering with excitement. "Yes, Evie," he cried, "and the first line is a prophecy;—where the woman sinned the maid *has* won." He seized the hand which I instinctively reached out to him. "We have not seen the end of this yet," he went on, speaking rapidly, and as if articulation had become difficult to him. "Come, Evie, we must go back to the house and look at the cabinet—now, at once."

I had risen to my feet by this time, but I shrank away at those words. "To that room? Oh, Alan—no, I cannot."

He had hold of my hand still, and he tightened his grasp upon it. "I shall be with you; you will not be afraid with me," he said. "Come." His eyes were burning, his face flushed and paled in rapid alternation, and his hand held mine like a vice of iron.

I turned with him, and we walked back to the Grange, Alan quickening his pace as he went, till I almost had to run by his side. As we approached the dreaded room my sense of repulsion became almost unbearable; but I was now infected by his excitement, though I but dimly comprehended its cause. We met no one on our way, and in a moment he had hurried me into the house, up the stairs, and

*(Continued on page 116)*

# THE EYRIE

IT'S A strange thing. We can't understand it. In last month's Eyrie we mentioned the enormous flood of manuscripts that daily inundates us, and now we're going to dwell briefly on a singular phase of this sea of words—a peculiar circumstance that might profitably be studied by your sedulous student of psychology.

These manuscripts come from all parts of the civilized world, and they come from all sorts of people—lawyers, truck drivers, doctors, farmers' wives, university professors, carpenters, high school girls, convicts, society women, drug fiends, ministers, policemen, novelists, hotel clerks and professional tramps—and one, therefore, would naturally expect their stories to possess a corresponding diversity. But not so. With rare exceptions, all these stories, written by all these different kinds of people, are almost exactly alike!

Not only do they contain the same general plots and themes—one might understand that—but practically all are written in the same style; all have the same grammatical blunders, the same misspelled words, the same errors in punctuation, the same eccentric quirks of phraseology. After plowing through fifty or so of these stories (and we often read that many in an evening), a man acquires the dazed impression that all are written by the same person. It's baffling! Why do the minds of these various types of people, living in different parts of the world and moving in dissimilar walks of life, slide comfortably into the same well-worn groove whenever they put their thoughts on paper? We give it up.

And now that we have that off our chest, we'll talk of something less inexplicable and more delightful—namely, the Success of WEIRD TALES. That WEIRD TALES *is* a success there seems no gainsaying now. When we made our bow with the first issue we were hopeful, yet not certain, of a cordial reception. With the second issue, our uncertainty began to vanish. And now, with this the third number of WEIRD TALES, we can happily announce that we're here to stay. WEIRD TALES has "caught on" even more quickly than we hoped it would. The reaction of the public indicates that a vast multitude of people had long been waiting for just this sort of magazine.

We find a like indication in the enormous number of letters from delighted readers. We expected some such response, but we scarcely hoped for this multiplicity! We're fairly deluged with these encomiums—and a little bewildered, too, and not quite sure which ones to choose for The Eyrie and which to leave out. Perhaps, then, we'd best shut our eyes and grab a handful at random. . . .

We open our eyes and discover this:

**"Dear Sir and Friend: Many times in the past I have been tempted to write different editors, telling them how I enjoyed certain stories. But always something restrained me. As I read almost every fiction magazine published in America, you will understand how often I have wanted to compliment them.**

**"Last night I saw a copy of your new magazine and bought one. Although I had an early rehearsal at the theatre this morning, I started at the first story AND NEVER LAID IT DOWN UNTIL I HAD READ THE LAST LINE OF THE LAST STORY!**

**"I can truthfully say I never dreamed a magazine could contain what I call 100 per cent stories. The thing that is worrying me now is the long wait until next month and the arrival of the next issue. Dear Mr. Editor, why not a weekly? It is the ONE magazine I wish were a daily! I am going to boost it to all my friends, as I am sure they will be glad I called their attention to it. . . . I feel you have undertaken a brave proposition, and there must be many thousands of others who will await its arival just as anxiously as I.**

**"In conclusion, let me thank you for your dauntless courage and express the sincere hope that you may never weaken. Always count me as one of your very best boosters for this absolutely wonderful magazine, and always believe me to be**

**"One who admires courage and determination,**

**"L. William Pitzer,**

**"Director, Girard Avenue Theatre Co., Philadelphia."**

That serves very neatly for a starter, does it not? In fact, we doubt if the Editor himself could have written a more fervid panegyric! Mr. Pitzer, we gather, is even more feverishly absorbed in WEIRD TALES than we are—and we thought we were rather interested in it. What he says about publishing it every week is interesting, but as for a *daily*—Heaven help us! The man doesn't live who could do it!

Of compelling charm is the following communication, postmarked Vera Cruz, Mexico, from Charles M. Boone, Third Officer of the Steamship *Yumuri*:

**"Editor, WEIRD TALES: I, acting on a 'hunch,' purchased your March issue in Brooklyn, along with other reading matter for sea use, and your publication was so far in advance of the others that I could not resist a letter to you expressing my appreciation and wishing WEIRD TALES a long and prosperous voyage on the sea of literature, and with just such precious cargo as is carried in the March issue.**

**"I work and live on the Yumuri, a tramp steamer out of New Orleans. New Orleans, as you know, was requisitioned by you people 'up there,' some years ago, to fasten the other end of the I. C. R. R. to, and now New Orleans requisitions us to carry your freight away as rapidly as possible so that you can't push her overboard into the Gulf by using said railroad as a handspike. You can gather from this that at present I have no fixed address for mailing purposes, such as I would need to have you mail WEIRD TALES to me regularly, but I am enclosing price of April number, and if you will kindly have same mailed to me at address given I'll feel greatly obliged, and can arrange with some newsdealer in New Orleans to save an issue for me each month.**

**"Your magazine (the only copy on board) is slowly making the rounds of the ship. So far, everybody is favorably impressed, except the cat and the goat, and those who have not read it are lined up awaiting their turn. At present the Old Man (skipper) is locked in his cabin, submerged in 'A Dead Man's Tale,' and he swears he will shoot anyone that interrupts him. As he is a**

veteran of four wars, has a .45 Colts, a bad 'rep,' and is able to swear in every known (and several unknown) tongues, it is a pretty safe bet that he won't be disturbed, and that you will have another 'fan' as soon as he comes up for air.

"It has given the first officer, Mr. Henkleman, the 'jimmies.' Mr. Weeks, the second officer, joins me in expressing his appreciation of your efforts, and wishes me to say to you that he will gladly do anything in his power to further the interests of your publication. . . . Our mess boy says you ought to be arrested. You see, he stole some time off to read Mr. Rud's yarn. He was supposed to be on duty, but was found by the steward (his immediate superior) in an unused state room (where he thought he would be safe from discovery) while deep in the story. The steward threw the door open suddenly—just as the boy reached the climax—and I guess he thought one of Mr. Rud's monsters had him!

"WEIRD TALES is doing good on board, too. We have had a little trouble in getting one hombre to respond quickly to fire and boat drill signal. Today the alarm was sounded while he was in the midst of a yarn, and, although his quarters are far removed from Assembly, he beat every mother's son to the lifeboats. We have a cargo of gunpowder and dynamite on board, consigned to Vera Cruz, where this letter will be mailed, and that may have helped some, but I believe that your magazine was the prime impulse. . . ."

There is a good deal more to the foregoing letter, but at least we've quoted enough to show that all on board the *Yumuri*, except the goat and cat, seem to be enjoying WEIRD TALES—and when the crew and officers are through with it they'll probably throw it at the cat or feed it to the goat. Seafaring men, as a rule, are excellent judges of fiction; wherefore the praise of Third Officer Boone pleases us immensely.

Here's a breezy digest of the March issue from George F. Morgan, 680 North Vine Street, Hazleton, Pennsylvania:

"Dear Editor of Hair-Exercising Tales: The other evening, while looking over some magazines at my favorite book store, I happened to notice your March issue of WEIRD TALES, and the title at once seemed to strike me as being something different, so I immediately bade a genuine American quarter good-by and took a copy along home with me. I wish to state right now that I got two-dimes-and-a-nickel's worth of well-balanced thrills out of that issue and would be willing to pay the war tax on it also.

" 'The Dead Man's Tale' was real interesting, and it is only too true that stories of that type are nearly as scarce as the guinea pig's tail. The terrible creature in 'Ooze' was as horrible if not worse than some of the snakes in home-made Booze. Dad lost two nights' sleep trying to figure out what "The Thing of a Thousand Shapes' could really be. Guess he'll have to wait till April, like the rest of us poor guessers.

" 'The Mystery of Black Jean' sure was a bear of a story, but it is sad that the notorious hero should end up in a lime factory. Uncle Mart (who works in the coal mines) read 'The Grave,' and it sure must have scared him, because he is now working outside in the weather. Baby let the rattle fall while Ma was reading 'Hark! The Rattle!' and it took all the smelling salts on hand to bring her to.

"It's a good idea to have lots of lamps in the room before beginning a story like 'The Ghost Guard,' and be sure they are filled with a good grade of oil, 'cause if they should go out in the middle of such a story Lord only knows what would happen! Stories like 'The Ghoul and the Corpse' have the same effect on your back as twenty below zero. Ma read 'Weaving Shadows' out loud, and sister's beau went home at ten-thirty. Sister wondered why he didn't stay till twelve, as was his custom.

"Dad gave our copy of WEIRD TALES to the neighbor's kids, and Mrs. Murphy is still wondering why they get the evening supply of coal up from the cellar so early."

Quite a family affair, we'll say; and (assuming that George isn't kidding us) isn't it amazing how much disturbance a single copy of W. T. can create in a peaceful neighborhood?

Especially gratifying to the business office (likewise to your Ed.) are letters such as this:

"Dear sir: The other day, as I stopped at a nearby newsstand, I noticed a copy of the March issue of WEIRD TALES. As I am much interested in the type of story which this magazine presents, and continually on the lookout for new magazines of all kinds, I immediately bought one.

" 'Do you know,' said the dealer, 'it is surprising how that magazine has sold. I took six copies this morning, wondering if they would sell. You have just bought the sixth. Next time I can judge my order better.'

"I have read the issue, and I wish to contgratulate you on your initiative in putting before the reading public stories such as it is almost impossible to obtain elsewhere. Several of my friends, who have picked up the copy, after reading some of the stories, have expressed their approval and wishes for a continued success.

"James P. Marshall,
"409 Marlboro Street,
"Boston, Mass."

Thanks! If there is any one thing that pleases us more than printing exceptional stories in WEIRD TALES it is the news that a dealer is selling *all* his quota. It wounds us grievously to see unsold copies returned.

Earl L. Bell of Augusta, Georgia, writes us:

"Dear Mr. Baird: Just a few lines to tell you how I enjoyed the natal issue of WEIRD TALES. For years I have been looking for just such a periodical. I'm tired of reading magazines that cater to the type of stuff that milady likes to read as she lies in bed, holds the periodical with one hand and feeds chocolates to a poodle with the other.

"I have often remarked that Poe's stories, if written today instead of many years ago, would be dubbed pure rot by most of the American magazines. The editors admit that Poe's horror tales are among the most gripping stories ever penned. Then why is it they taboo such stories today?

"I think you have the right trail. Especially thrilling and well-written were 'The Ghoul and the Corpse' and 'The Young Man Who Wanted to Die.' For sheer imagery, word-pictures and mastery of style, both stories reached perihelion."

We, too, have often wondered why other magazines shun the sort of stories that we gladly accept; and it is not unlikely that if Poe were living today he would find no market for his work except in WEIRD TALES. The reason for this we do not know (and we don't know that we care a damn), but we do know this: In editing WEIRD TALES we follow no precedent, bow to no custom, honor no tradition. When we took this job we chucked all those things in the waste-basket and told the janitor to dump them in the rubbish heap. We started out to blaze a new path in magazine literature, and we're going to do it, or die in the effort.

And while we're on this topic we must quote a few lines in a letter from Professor George W. Crane of the Department of Psychology at Northwestern University:

"Dear sir: I am writing to express my keen appreciation of **WEIRD TALES.** I read some months ago that it was to be published soon, and I looked forward with great interest toward reading the first number. It answers a definite lack in modern magazine fiction, and one which is wholesome.

"The type of story which you feature is not immoral, but is very stimulating, and forms a pleasing diversion to me from heavier and more abstract material. Mr. Rud's tale, 'Ooze,' is extremely bizarre, and I am recommending it to my colleague in the faculty of the Department of Zoology. I will predict, from the analysis of human interests, that **WEIRD TALES** will have a tremendous success."

We need only add that Professor Crane is a gifted prophet; for his prediction is rapidly being fulfilled.

Equally germane to the subject we're discussing is the following letter from Edward Schultz, 335 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, New York:

"Dear sir: I have had the pleasure of very recently discovering your delightful publication, **WEIRD TALES.** I do not know whether it is the first issue or not, but I do know that I shall never miss a future issue if the March number is any standard of those to follow. Of about twenty or more periodicals to which I subscribe, **WEIRD TALES** is the only one that I somehow find time to read from cover to cover.

"Being a great admirer of the late Edgar Allen Poe, whose works I have read many times over, I was more than agreeably surprised to find his matchless style abound in **WEIRD TALES.**

"Allow me to congratulate you on your innovation, which I shall heartily recommend to my friends. But please keep it as it is—keep out plain and overworked stuff about detectives, wild west, etc. There are a great number of us who want weirdness to the nth power in our recreational reading. I shall eagerly look forward to the April issue."

* * * * *

WE'VE just grabbed another fistful of letters, and the first one we open is this:

"Dear sir: At last a fiction magazine that is different! Congratulations! You are correct—people do like to read this kind of fiction.

"You asked us to mention the stories we liked and those we didn't like so well. I enjoyed, in their order, 'The Thing of a Thousand Shapes,' which still has me in suspense, 'The Place of Madness,' 'The Weaving Shadows,' 'The Grave,' 'The Skull,' 'The Extraordinary Experiment of Dr. Calgroni.'

"'The Basket,' I thought rather pointless. The plot of 'Ooze' excellent, but just a trifle above the average reader to understand in detail. 'The Chain' was too long drawn out.

"And do give us less of unfaithful wives and husbands. I may seem too critical, perhaps, but let me say that I wish the magazine were published twice a month, for how refreshing to find that interesting stories can be written without 'love interest.' Please leave that to the movies and to the countless other magazines."—S. A. N.

And the next is from Richard P. Israel, 620 Riverside Drive, New York City:

"Dear Sir: Have just finished reading your new magazine, **WEIRD TALES,** and would like to say it's a peach. It is just the kind that wakes a man up after he has put in a hard day's work. . . . Could you possibly run some snappy, spooky baseball stories? I am sure that almost everybody will like them, baseball being our national game."

We don't remember ever seeing anything spooky in baseball; and yet—who knows?—perhaps Mr. Israel can tell us something about the ghosts that haunt the Cubs.

A. L. Richard, 9234 Cottage Grove Avenue, Chicago, knows what he likes and doesn't like, and he doesn't hesitate to speak right out in meeting. As witness:

"Dear Mr. Baird: May I congratulate you as a delighted reader of your excellent magazine? You can not wish more for its success than I do, for I have long felt the need of such a periodical. So much of the mental feed given us by other editors is fit only for infants. We red-blooded men want something that stirs the sterner emotions. We want to be scared stiff. Too many of us think nothing can make us afraid; your stories will fill us with terror. Some of us are too lazy and sleep more than we should; your tales will keep us awake more of the time and thus give us more pep and vim, and makes our lives worth living.

"Most of the stories in your first number are excellent; some few rather indifferent. To my mind the best were 'The Dead Man's Tale,' 'Ooze,' 'The Extraordinary Experiment of Dr. Calgroni (although the transferring of a brain from one person to another was done some time ago in another story) and 'The Skull.' 'Hark! the Rattle!' I thought a trifle too rhetorical and exclamatory; 'Nimba, the Cave Girl' not properly a weird tale; 'The Ghost Guard' not quite convincing; and 'The Sequel' no improvement on Poe.

"But these are my own personal likes and dislikes; I have no doubt that many others of your readers preferred the very tales that did not impress me. On the whole, you are to be felicitated on your venture, and I hope that **WEIRD TALES** will enjoy enormous sales. If most people think as I do, it will."

Analytical, too, is Miss Violet Olive Johnson, who writes to us from Portland, Oregon:

"I think 'The Accusing Voice' is of the best, because the denouement is so unexpected, yet so logical. I liked 'Hark! the Rattle' on account of its touch of fantasy. 'The Dead Man's Tale' was a masterpiece, I thought. And it's right in line with modern spiritualism, too. It conveys quite a definite lesson in regeneration, even if it does deal with a disembodied spirit. I agree with Anthony M. Rud, in The Eyrie, that such a magazine as **WEIRD TALES** is not only clean, but contains the ingredients of wholesome, moral lessons. And it certainly is unique and hair-raising. I didn't experience a dull moment!"

At the risk of emulating the talented authors of patent medicine almanacs and overlapping the space vouchsafed The Eyrie, we must quote a few brief excerpts from a few of the letters we got in that second grab:

". . . Some of the tales made me shiver when I read them here alone at night. . . . Two things in particular I like about your magazine: the very large number of short stories and the fact that there is only one serial. . . . But there is one thing I don't favor: the sensational, blood-and-thunder titles of some of the stories. Something like 'The Accusing Voice,' 'The Place of Madness,' 'The Weaving Shadows,' is 'woolly' enough for most of us, I

should say. 'The Skull,' 'The Ghoul and the Corpse,' 'The Grave,' are all too—you see what I mean?"—F. L. K., Indianapolis.

"I have just finished the first installment of 'The Thing of a Thousand Shapes.' It is fine, and any one who has a good imagination should not 'start it late at night.' I want to congratulate you on your fine magazine."—Victor Wilson, Hazen, Pa.

". . . . Just finished reading the first number, and I agree with Mr. Anthony M. Rud that this magazine should be welcomed by the public. I have often wondered why it was that the ordinary magazine would not publish out-of-the-ordinary stories—that is, stories of the occult or weird. . . . One thing I know: the name of Edgar Allen Poe will live long after the names of some of the writers of commonplace fiction are forgotten."—J. O. O'C., Raleigh, N. C.

". . . . May I add my congratulations on the success of your work which resulted in that first number of WEIRD TALES? To choose a name for a new magazine and then live up to that name so thoroughly is hardly ever done so well. I shall look for future numbers of the magazine with interest."—R. M., St. Peterburg, Fla.

". . . . Truly, I never read such weird tales before, and I am anxious to read more. . . ."—Harry M. Worth, Brooklyn, N. Y.

". . . . It offers the utmost in thrilling fiction and a pleasurable excursion from this land of realism. I wish you the greatest success and am looking forward anxiously to your next copy."—Mrs. Glenn Thompson Cummings, Lansing, Mich.

"I am a lover of all fiction that deals with the supernatural. . . . I eagerly devoured your March issue from cover to cover. . . . The story that impressed me the most was 'The Ghost Guard,' as it was a combination of the practical and supernatural, blended together in an exciting narrative. . . ."—Dean Smith.

". . . . I am a soldier in the Coast Artillery and am stationed on an island twenty-five miles from land. . . . The news company that furnishes our post exchange with magazines sent one copy of your magazine, and I bought it right away. . . . I think it is the best book I ever read. . . . You have made a wonderful start, and if they are all as good each month you may be sure I will never miss a copy. . . ."—Private R. S. Bray, 133d Co. Detachment, Fort Terry, N. Y.

When we began writing the copy for this month's Eyrie we thought we'd end it with some pertinent remarks on a matter that has aroused our curiosity—to-wit: the preponderance of cats and Chinamen in weird literature—but we'll have to let it go. No space. You'll find it in The Eyrie for June, however.

You will also find, in the June WEIRD TALES, some of the most amazing short stories and novelettes that ever swam into our ken. Three of them in particular we earnestly recommend. They are more startling than any we've ever published—and we can't say more than that.

THE EDITOR.

# THE CLOSED CABINET

*(Continued from page 112)*

along the narrow passage, and I was once more in the east room, and in the presence of all the memories of that accursed night. For an instant I stood strengthless, helpless, on the threshold, my gaze fixed panic-stricken on the spot where I had taken such awful part in that phantom tragedy of evil; then Alan threw his arm round me, and drew me hastily on in front of the cabinet. Without a pause, giving himself time neither to speak nor think, he stretched out his left hand and moved the buttons one after another. How or in what direction he moved them I know not; but as the last turned with a click, the doors, which no mortal hand had unclosed for three hundred years, flew back, and the cabinet stood open. I gave a little gasp of fear. Alan pressed his lips closely together, and turned to me with eager questioning in his eyes. I pointed in answer tremblingly at the drawer which I had seen open the night before. He drew it out, and there on its satin bed lay the dagger in its silver sheath. Still without a word he took it up, and reaching his right hand round me, for I could not now have stood had he withdrawn his support, with a swift strong jerk he unsheathed the blade. There in the clear autumn sunshine I could see the same dull stains I had marked in the flickering candle-light, and over them, still ruddy and moist, were the drops of my own half-dried blood. I grasped the lapel of his coat with both my hands, and clung to him like a child in terror, while the eyes of both of us remained fixed as if fascinated upon the knife-blade. Then, with a sudden start of memory, Alan raised his to the cornice of the cabinet, and mine followed. No change that I could detect had taken place in that twisted goldwork; but there, clear in the sight of us both, stood forth the words of the magic motto:

"Pure blood shed by the blood-stained knife
Ends Mervyn shame, heals Mervyn strife."

In low steady tones Alan read out the lines, and then there was silence—on my part of stunned bewilderment, the bewilderment of a spirit overwhelmed beyond the power of comprehension by rushing, conflicting emotions. Alan pressed me closer to him, while the silence seemed to throb with the beating of his heart and the panting of his breath. But except for that he remained motionless, gazing at the golden message before him. At length I felt a movement, and looking up saw his face turned down towards mine, the lips quivering, the cheeks flushed, the eyes soft with passionate feeling. "We are saved, my darling," he whispered; "saved, and through you." Then he bent his head lower, and there in that room of horror, I received the first long lover's kiss from my own dear husband's lips.

. . . . . .

My husband, yes; but not till some time after that. Alan's first act, when he had once fully realized that the curse was indeed removed, was—throwing his budding practice to the winds—to set sail for America. There he sought out Jack, and labored hard to impart to him some of his own newfound hope. It was slow work, but he succeeded at last; and only left him when, two years later, he had handed him over to the charge of a bright-eyed Western girl, to whom the whole story had been told, and who showed herself ready and anxious to help in building up again the broken life of her English lover. To judge from the letters that we have since received, she has shown herself well fitted for the task. Among other things she has money, and Jack's worldly affairs have so prospered that George declares that he can well afford now to waste some of his superfluous cash upon farming a few of his elder brother's acres. The idea seems to smile upon Jack, and I have every hope this winter of being able to institute an actual comparison between our small boy, his namesake, and his own three-year-old Alan. The comparison, by the way, will have to be conditional, for Jacket—the name by which my son and heir is familiarly known—is but a little more than two.

I turn my eyes for a moment, and they fall upon the northern corner of the East Room, which shows round the edge of the house. Then the skeleton leaps from the cupboard of my memory; the icy hand which lies ever near my soul grips it suddenly with a chill shudder. Not for nothing was that wretched woman's life interwoven with my own, if only for an hour; not for nothing did my spirit harbor a conflict and an agony, which, thank God, are far from its own story. Though Margaret Mervyn's dagger failed to pierce my flesh, the wound in my soul may never wholly be healed. I know that that is so; and yet as I turn to start through the sunshine to the cedar shade and its laughing occupants, I whisper to myself with fervent conviction, "It was worth it."

# Finding "The Fountain of Youth"

## *A Long-Sought Secret, Vital to Happiness, Has Been Discovered.*

## *By H. M. Stunz*

*Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!*
*That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!*
—Omar Khayyam.

A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman, has been solved. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" of financial success. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—success and happiness in love and marriage—and there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of science and its value has been proved. It "works." And because it does work—surely, speedily and most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in many years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from lives of disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is that it removes physical handicaps which, in the past, have been considered inevitable and irremediable. I refer to the loss of youthful animation and a waning of the vital forces. These difficulties have caused untold unhappiness—failures, shattered romances, mysterious divorces. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes the organism and, in a physical sense, old age comes on when life should be at its prime.

But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of youth too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verses, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search—without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth," an infallible method of renewing energy lost or depleted by disease, overwork, worry, excesses or advancing age.

Now the long search has been rewarded. A "fountain of youth" has been found! Science announces unconditionally that youthful vigor can be restored quickly and safely. Lives clouded by weakness can be illumined by the sunlight of health and joy. Old age, in a sense, can be kept at bay and youth made more glorious than ever. And the discovery which makes these amazing results possible is something any man or woman, young or old, can easily use in the privacy of the home, unknown to relative, friend or acquaintance.

The discovery had its origin in famous European laboratories. Brought to America, it was developed into a product that has given most remarkable results in thousands of cases, many of which had defied all other treatments. In scientific circles the discovery has been known and used for several years and has caused unbounded amazement by its quick, harmless, gratifying action. Now in convenient tablet form, under the name of Korex compound, it is available to the general public.

Any one who finds the youthful stamina ebbing, life losing its charm and color or the feebleness of old age coming on too soon, can obtain a double-strength treatment of this compound, sufficient for ordinary cases, under a positive guarantee that it costs nothing if it fails and only $2 if it produces prompt and gratifying results. In average cases, the compound often brings about amazing benefits in from twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

Simply write in confidence to the Melton Laboratories, 833 Massachusetts Bldg., Kansas City, Mo., and this wonder restorative will be mailed to you in a plain wrapper. You may enclose $2 or, if you prefer, just send your name without money and pay the postman $2 and postage when the parcel is delivered. In either case, if you report after a week that the Korex compound has not given satisfactory results, your money will be refunded immediately. The Melton Laboratories are nationally known and thoroughly reliable. Moreover, their offer is fully guaranteed, so no one need hesitate to accept it. If you need this remarkable scientific rejuvenator, write for it today.

# The Thunder Voice

*(Continued from page 95)*

*will ever see that which is written here—but because I have been accustomed to write down the things which are me—those inner thoughts and impulses which possess and dominate me.*

Then followed pages describing her life in the cave—and of night journeys through the woods when her mate would delight himself in voicing wild cries—sounds which she came to love. Wildly she rejoiced with him, and laughed as she thought of the terror these resounding cries brought to the simple folk in the valley below them.

Strangest of all, she thought, was his understanding of her slightest wish without the medium of words.

On one occasion she was trying to arrange her long hair, but the hairpins she had brought to the cave had, one by one, been lost. It was impossible to arrange the hair with none, and she had been vexed. That very night he brought her some hairpins and two side-combs. The latter she recognized—they belonged to Lucy Duval! Again she wondered how he had obtained them; and laughed as she considered Lucy's probable fright.

Another time she had shivered with the cold, for the cave had been damp—the next night he brought clothing, and several woolen blankets.

Whatever he might be to others, he was her chosen man. He could not live her kind of life—gladly she would live his.

Then came an entry on the very last page.

*"The storm! How it has rained, and rained, until somewhere the flood has changed the course of some small stream, and now we are imprisoned—the water has risen to the roof of the cave, and we can no longer leave it in the boat. The flood came quite suddenly, last night, while we slept.*

*"Perhaps it may subside in time—but probably it will not. I shall write no more. Good-bye, little book, and good-bye to all—everything! In dying I can reflect that at least I have lived. So very many never do!"*

I closed the book. At last my strong desire to *know* had been gratified. In the yellowed manuscript which I held in my hand was inscribed the last chapter in the mystery of The Thunder Voice.

Now that curiosity was satisfied, the professional instinct asserted itself. I reflected on the peculiar warped trait which so often causes a woman gifted with all the refinements of civilization to become infatuated with a male who is, in every sense, a barbarian.

I recalled the season at Earlscourt exposition in London when a dozen black, repulsive-featured cannibals had been exhibited. The over-zealous attentions of a concourse of well-dressed women of apparent refinement, who daily surged about them, caused their removal from the exhibit.

No, there was nothing very remarkable in the infatuation confessed by Margaret Kingsley. At least it was not remarkable to those who observe life with wide-open eyes.

the strange silence of the place. Not a servant answered their ring. And after a time, since the door stood open, they entered and began to ascend the stairs.

A strange, weird, lonesome sound floated down to them—the yowl of a cat.

They stopped for an instant and looked at each other, and then, reassured by the sunlight, and both being matter-of-fact professional people, they pressed on. At the head of the stairs they faced a long passage at the end of which was an open door.

"Look! That is the bedroom he wrote about," whispered the nurse, grasping the interne's arm.

They walked softly down the passage to the door and looked in. On the bed lay the man they sought, glassy-eyed, with fallen jaw and livid face—*dead!*

On his breast stood a great yellow amber-eyed cat, who faced them with an arched back and menacing snarl. Involuntarily, they drew back. The cat sprang past them and down the passageway to the stairs, uttering the same weird cry.

"My God!" gasped the nurse, with pallid lips. "Did you see? About that cat's neck—and it was a Tartar cat; I know the breed—about that cat's neck was—was the Topaz and Jade collar—that—that he wrote about!"

## Neighbors See "Sacred Heart" in Girl's Death Room

**AFTER the death of Lillian Daly, a very devout girl of Chicago, the report spread that a "sacred heart" could be seen on the wall of the room wherein she had died and that if any afflicted person should touch this heart he or she would be instantly cured. At once the house at 6724 Justine Street was visited by numbers of ill persons, all eager to experience the magic cure. Two priests from neighborhood parishes visited the house, but said they could not see the apparition.**

## Hold "Petting Parties" in Morgue

**A GRISLY spot for love-making was chosen by a wealthy undertaker of Chicago, whose stories of "petting parties" in a morgue, wine parties in a mortuary chapel and "shimmy" dances in an embalming room caused a woman to file suit against him for $50,000. The woman claims he attacked her reputation.**

## THE DEATH CELL

*(Continued from page 88)*

the thoughtless section must have received impressions. You will remember that, following his melancholia, McKay desired above all to talk of Larson, and in dwelling on this the usually inactive hemisphere probably received its impressions."

"Do you believe that he will always remain as Larson?" I asked.

"It is my belief that he will. He says that he is Larson, and he acts the life of Larson. Impossible as it may sound, I believe that exactly six years from the day of his execution, McKay, as Larson, will die—a victim of auto-suggestion and the vividness of his imagination."

## JUNGLE BEASTS

*(Continued from page 29)*

ozoic marshes, a dainty morsel for her kitten.

And so—farewell!

"SUCH a weird tale!" the nurse shuddered, as the interne finished the manuscript. "Let us drive over to Cheshire Manor and—"

"Do you believe this story?" interrupted the interne, tapping the manuscript with his fingers, and skeptically lifting his eyebrows and smiling.

"No, of course not!" exclaimed the nurse, "but—the drive won't do us any harm, and—I would like to make sure."

As they stopped their car before the somber old mansion they were struck by

# The Whispering Thing

*(Continued from page 84)*

a phantom when at large, and, when in the toils, as slippery as an eel. Execution of the plan I have formed, therefore, I am going to entrust to you. It is very doubtful if I could slip through the cordon of police around the house but I think that you may be able to do so, and it is very necessary that one of us should. Here, then, is what I want you to do:

"The soviet agent, No. 29, is waiting in New York for the Q-gas formula. He is stopping at the Alpin Hotel. The formula is locked in a safe-deposit box in the Exporter's Bank in this city. The box was rented by me under the name of John G. McGlynn. I want you to take the first train to New York and get No. 29 to return to Washington with you. It is too risky for you to try to telegraph him.

"I will give you a paper authorizing him to open the box and remove the formula. The formula is to be replaced with fifty thousand dollars in gold, the second and final installment of the price No. 29 agreed to pay for the secret.

"After the exchange, which must take place in your presence, you are to rejoin me here and we will settle our score with Peret, and then take steps to extricate ourselves from the net he has woven around us. The most important thing now is the formula. Once we have gotten rid of that, we can doubtless make our get-away. We have done so many times in the past under circumstances almost as trying as the present ones, and we can doubtless do so again.

"What do you think of the plan, Sing? It is filled with danger, but—if you can think of a better one, I should be glad to hear it."

"I agree with you as to the danger," rejoined the Chinaman in a strange voice, and then, very suddenly, he pressed the muzzle of an automatic against Deweese's temple.

With his free hand he then swept the wax wrinkles from his face and grinned. Deweese, in spite of the proximity of the automatic, recoiled. The man was not Sing Tong Fat. He was *Jules Peret!*

"Move at your peril, *Monsieur,*" warned the detective. Then, raising his voice, "Hello, major!" he shouted.

The door swung open, and Major Dobson, accompanied by Detective Sergeant Strange and Harvey Bendlow, entered the room. Behind them came O'Shane and Frank, dragging between them Sing Tong Fat, the latter bound and gagged and minus his skull cap and outer clothing which, needless to say, now adorned the head and body of the mirthful French detective.

"Did you hear the conversation, Major?" cried Peret gleefully.

"Every word of it," declared Dobson, much gratified at the success of Peret's stratagem. "Sergeant Strange and I were watching through a crack in the door and heard and saw all. The stenographer in the hall has it all down. The jig is up, Mr. *Alias* Deweese," he added, turning to the international agent. "Your goose is cooked, and the mystery of the 'invisible monster' is a thing of the past."

"You devil!" shouted Deweese hoarsely, glaring at the Frenchman; "you have trapped me!"

"So I have," agreed Peret, wiping the yellow stain from his face with a handkerchief. "But did I not promise you that I would do so? Ah, *Monsieur,* if you but knew what it cost me to keep my promise! Did I not have to sacrifice my hair and beautiful mustache this morning? Still, the wig and false mustache I wore before I donned Sing Tong Fat's regalia looked very natural, did they not? They must have, since they deceived you, my friend. But you should see my head without a covering! it looks like the egg of the ostrich."

He pressed Sing Tong Fat's skull-cap down more firmly on his head and laughed heartily.

*"Ma foi,"* he continued, as he removed from his face the little pads of wax that had given his eyes an almond slant, "I almost feel tempted to make my present impersonation permanent. Sing is such a handsome and charming man—which doubtless explains why he fought so hard to retain his identity. When he was seized by my good friends in the vestibule, as he opened the door to let me out awhile ago, he was an astonished and infuriated man. He fought, hissed and scratched like the cat of the alley. And how he glared at them when they divested him of his clothing and helped me to make up my face to look like his own. Look at him glaring at me now!

"My colleagues say I am a mimic and make-up artist of the first order, and when I think how beautifully I deceived you, *M. le Comte di Dalfonzo,* I am almost persuaded that they are right."

THE END.

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# How My Wife Learned to Play the Piano in 90 Days

**A husband's story of the fulfillment of a life-long wish—by a new, easy, spare-time method which has brought the joy of music into thousands of silent homes.**

FROM boyhood, I vowed that if ever I had a home of my own there would be music in it. No wife for me unless she could play some instrument, and play it well. My new home must have no dull, bored evenings, no monotonous Sunday afternoons. I wanted the gaiety, the mental and physical stimulus, the whole-hearted, genuine joy of music. No girl could capture me without the lure of musical skill.

But one day Beth came along knowing not one note from another, yet with a merry, humming tune forever on her lips, and a song in her heart for me. And Beth is Mrs. Taylor today. A piano graced our new home, but somehow the old vow was forgotten, and stayed forgotten until Jimmy Jr., and Beth No. 2 were quite some youngsters.

Then along about the time the novelty of parenthood began to wear off a bit, the old vow came back. And one evening I spoke out with a suddenness that surprised me, "Beth, I'd give a hundred dollars if you could play something—a piano, violin, banjo, ukulele—something, *anything*." Beth looked so hurt I was immediately ashamed of myself, so I said no more, and the matter dropped, as I thought regretfully, forever.

About three months later I got home early one night, and I heard the old dead piano come to life—sounded good, too, first a little jazzy piece, then a sweet plantation melody. "Company to supper; I wonder who?" I thought; and I crept to the parlor door to see. There at the piano was *Beth* playing, and the two kiddies beating time. She saw me, and stopped, "Oh," she cried, "I'm so sorry!" "Believe me, I'm not," I shouted, and I grabbed the whole family up in my arms.

"But, Jim, I wanted to wait and surprise you when I could really play. I'm learning fast, but it's only three months since I found out"—"Found out what?" I said. Beth began to cry. "I know!" Jimmy, Jr., piped up, "Mother found out the way to learn music just like I am learning to read in school—only lots easier."

Well, that little musical party lasted all the evening. It was a howling success. When the kiddies had gone singing to bed, my wife showed me the marvelous new method by which she had learned to play in three months' spare time.

Jimmy Jr. had told the truth; the method was so simple and easy that any one at all from 8 years up could learn by it. By this method the U. S. School of Music, the largest in the world, has already trained over three hundred thousand people, teaching the playing of any musical instrument almost in the same way a school-child learns to read. But very much faster because older children and grown people have better trained minds, and know how to study and think.

When first learning to read you look at every letter separately and spell out every word, c-a-t, m-a-n. Later you do not see the letters; you see the words as units, "cat," "man." By and by longer words become units to you, and you find that whole *expressions*, like "up the steps," "on the train," no longer are seen as separate words, but immediately, at one instant, without spelling, without thinking words, you see each expression in the unit form.

This skill in seeing in units develops until you see and know as units hundreds of long familiar phrases; and it is even entirely possible, if you wish, to easily increase your reading speed four or five times the average, grasping paragraph thoughts complete, sensing a whole page instantly, recognizing every part, registering and remembering all, with your pleasure exactly the same as the slower reader.

The same easy understanding and complete enjoyment is similarly a part of the new way. The alphabet of music follows the alphabet of language. Each note is a letter, and playing is practically spelling the notes together correctly. The first note on the staff above is F. Whether you sing or play, it is always F. The four notes shown above are F-A-C-E, easy to remember because they spell "face." Certain strings on mandolin, certain keys on piano, certain parts of all instruments, are these same notes. Once you learn them, playing melodies is a matter of *acting* what you see.

And here is where "familiar phrases" come in—the "big secret." It is so simple you probably have already guessed it. The "familiar phrases" of music are its harmonies. Just as you instantly recognize the countless phrases of speech, so the relatively few of music are quickly a habit with you. You play almost before you realize it—and every step is real fun, fascinating, simple, interesting, almost too good to be true.

Remember, neither my wife nor most of the 300,000 other musicians trained by this method knew anything about music. Beth mastered the piano; she could just as easily have mastered anything else. Jimmy, Jr., is now taking up violin, and my daughter is learning singing. Right at home, no costly teacher, no classes at inconvenient hours, no useless study and practice. No numbers, no tricks, no makeshifts. But instead a sound musical education learning by notes. The intricacies of music reduced to a most amazing simplicity able to develop the inborn talent, which is a part of every person on this earth.

When I told Beth I was writing this out to put in a magazine she told me to be sure and say that the school will gladly send a free book explaining everything, called "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," and that right now there is a special short time Reduced Price Offer being made to music lovers. The book is free; asking for it obligates you not at all, but you should send for it right away before all copies may be gone.

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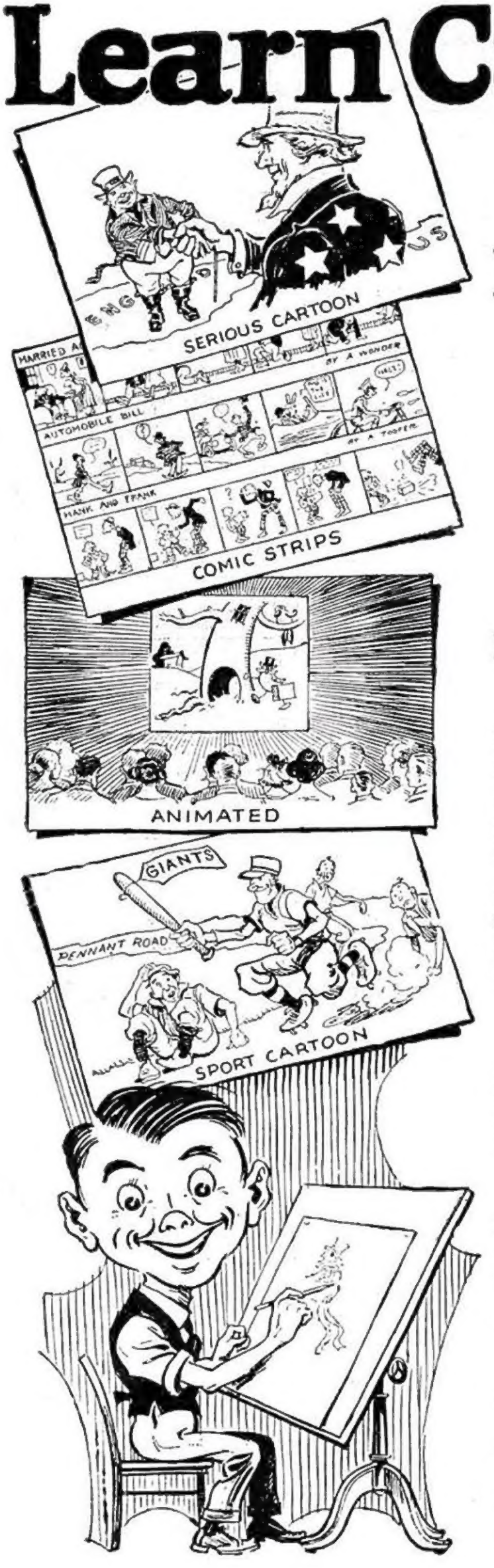


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First you learn the important fundamental principles of cartoon-making. Then you learn the little secrets of originating ideas, of action, exaggeration, and expression—the little tricks which make cartooning easy to those who know them. Step by step you advance through every branch of cartooning until almost before you realize it you are drawing cartoons that SELL. Many of our students have sold enough work while studying to pay for the course many times over.

Just think of earning a splendid salary for such pleasant work. Successful cartoonists earn from $3,000 to over $100,000 a year. Yet enough cartoonists cannot be found to meet the tremendous demand. Right now there is a wonderful opportunity for *you* in this fast-growing uncrowded field.

## Send for FREE BOOK

Find out more about the wonderful opportunities open to you in this attractive field. Learn more about this easy home-study method of learning cartooning. A handsome booklet has just been prepared which is crammed full of interesting information about cartooning, and describes in detail this remarkable method. It will be sent to you without cost, without obligation. Mail coupon for it TO-DAY!

**Washington School of Cartooning**

**Room 4612, 1113-15th St., N. W. Washington, D. C.**

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**WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF CARTOONING**
**Room 4612, 1113-15th St., N. W., Washington, D. C.**

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